



# GRAVITY

## **The Delaware's Great Gravity Adventure The Ultimate Unrest Cure**

By Brett A. Cabot.

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**"What you want, said the friend, is an Unrest-cure.  
An Unrest-cure? I've never heard of such a thing.**

**You've heard of Rest-cures for people who've broken down under stress of too much worry and strenuous living; well, you're suffering from overmuch repose and placidity, and you need the opposite kind of treatment."**

**...The Unrest-Cure by Saki...**

## **GRAVITY**

By Brett A. Cabot

### **CHAPTER ONE. MEET THE GRANDPARENTS**

It was a day like any other for Florence and Albert Delaware, their lives being fairly normal, well as normal as normal gets. Forty years together, forty years to establish routines and today like any other they were in the throes of those routines. So Florence and Albert were happy if not a little bored as they potted around their comfortable kitchen, preparing breakfast, in their modest two-storied ageing terrace on 24 Whale Street.

They didn't as a rule talk to each other in their pre breakfast amblings. In fact the silence wasn't usually broken until 10.30 am when the midmorning mail fluttered its way through the slit in the front door. Then the retiring Albert would dig out his magnifying glass; wander over well-worn linoleum, then bend down, bracing himself on the door handle and pick up the mail. Inspect it, and announce to Florence what had arrived and to whom it was for. Florence in reply would ask Albert if he cared for a cup of tea which of course he did.

And so the first words of the day were spoken. Out would come the tea and together they'd settle onto the settee to read the mail... Have a bit of a chat, mostly about the mail or weather observations, perhaps a reference to last night's television...

Once the tea ceremony was completed, Florence would clear the tea things away and they'd watch television and wait for lunch. Which was usually triggered by tummy rumblings emanating from underneath Albert's over large knit jumper, which in turn would send Florence into a frenzy of lunch preparation.

So deeply etched into their psyche were the triggers in their routines, that quite often if there was no mid morning mail delivery they wouldn't converse till lunch or later, let alone remember to have a cuppa tea. Or indeed turn on the television...

So there they sat, 8am, in silence munching respectively on toast and cornflakes with no chance of a chat till the 10.30 mail. If indeed it ever came. When out of the blue, with a just audible swoosh, a single off white card slipped through the letter slit in

the front door, wafting to the floor face down... Albert looked up from his cornflakes, perplexed by this unexpected interruption to the breakfast routine. Glancing over his bifocals, he eyed the card lying on the carpet by the front door - his mind became, somewhat, alive. Well, as alive as Albert's mind could get at this time of day or any other for that matter.

Could it be something is waiting at the post office? ... No, no it's too early. Albert thought. Or perhaps it's a council announcement of some sort, garbage pickup day? Clothes collection!?! ... Work on the gas mains, that sort of thing...

"It's way too early for the mail!" Albert said, turning towards Florence.

In fact too early for anything, other than breakfast and routine, He thought. Not really realising that he had spoken and that their ridged routine had been broken.

Florence's immediate response on hearing Albert talk was to, rhetorically, ask him if he cared for a cuppa tea, then excusing herself, she headed off to the kitchen to plug in the jug.

Albert's curiosity grew into mobility. Easing himself out of the chair he made his way by the well-worn route to the door and picked up the card. Turning it over with his fingers, Albert thought he recognised the local council logo but was blind as a bat, with or, without his glasses and definitely couldn't make out the fine print. Having forgotten, in all his excitement, where his magnifying glass was, he called out to Florence to come and read the card to him.

For the first time in an extremely long time, Albert and Florence had started to talk to each other before breakfast had finished. Although neither, really, noticed the significance in this act. In fact! Neither would, possibly, never ever fully appreciate the full impact this little off white card would have on their lives. A card with a message to flutter the very fabric of their, routine woven, suburban security blankets...

Florence came out from the kitchen, took the card from Albert, picked up her reading glasses from a side draw in the lounge room cabinet, then made her way to the settee opposite the television set. She was just about to seat herself down when a click from the kitchen distracted her. The jug had finished boiling. Florence hesitated for a moment mid-flight, and then opted to make the tea first. Popping her glasses and the card into her, bosomy blouse pocket. She straightened up and walked through into the kitchen.

All this time Albert stood there watching, waiting in anticipation about what could be written upon the card? ... Why would something arrive so early? ... Why was this event interrupting his otherwise predictable as clockwork, routine drenched morning? "Now what's she doing!?" Albert mumbled.

"I'm just fixing the tea first dear" Florence called out to him from the kitchen.

"In the mean time why don't you finish up your cornflakes, the card can wait for tea surely ". But Albert was too possessed, too obsessed with whatever could be written upon the card, definitely to distracted from his routine to go back to breakfast.

Instead he started to pace up and down the lounge room floor, at a speed a little above his normal ambling gait, accompanied by tea making rhythms emanating from the kitchen, supplied by Florence.

Time ticked on...

Albert thought he'd never known tea to take so long...

Florence, finally, re appeared through the kitchen doorway, tray of tea and biscuits in hand. The card, seductively, peeping over the top of her blouse pocket.

Albert couldn't take his gaze from that rectangle of white.

Florence shuffles cups and saucers, spoons, sugar and so into position on the coffee table. Cosies the teapot turns it three times and taps it twice then pours the tea.

Albert stops pacing the floor and sits down next to Florence on the settee. He is still visibly agitated, eyes glued to the pocketed card, temples pumping, building himself up in anticipation of what could be written upon it.

Florence slips the card from her blouse pocket, puts on her glasses, takes one quizzical look at it, and then turns it the right way up.

She reads to herself...

"Come on!" muttered Albert.

"How unusual!" exclaimed Florence, as she continues to peruse the card.

"What!?" blurted Albert, eager to know what it was all about.

Florence replies. "Well I'm not too sure what it all means but it seems they are going to turn off the gravity between two thirty and five this afternoon "...

She paused, as though waiting for a response... None came... Albert just stared blankly, grinding his teeth.

Not really understanding what she was reading Florence continued...

"It says we should take all appropriate measures to secure ourselves, the house, yard and contents, pets and small children and that we are under no circumstances to leave the house during the above stated hours.. "

"I wonder what appropriate measures mean?" queried Albert.

Snapping out of his stoic trance Albert leaps to his feet and starts ranting, this card was really starting to bother him.

"And what do they mean, turn the bloody gravity off, they can't do that! And who're they in the first place?"

Albert was up and away, searching madly through rooms, rummaging in draws and box's for his magnifying glass. He needed badly to verify this card and its contents for himself.

In the background Florence continued...

"Well, yes they can dear, it says here at the bottom of the card that it's for routine maintenance and that it is an essential procedure carried out by all responsible

councils to secure an even advantage for all constituents, and that all concerned citizens are obliged... "...

"What do you mean even advantage?" Albert called out from the bedroom, cutting her off mid sentence. He continued... "There's no such bloody thing ". He exclaimed, thinking the whole thing to be totally intolerable, and a damn inconvenience to boot.

"Still, don't you think we should do what they say? Florence replied.

"And what, take appropriate measures! So we all get an even advantage!?" Albert jested cynically from a side room, gesturing with one hand while frantically tossing things out of a cupboard draw with the other. One assumes still looking for his magnifying glass. The half-demented Albert was off on some tangent, not seeming to be digesting things clearly, if at all.

"I don't know, maybe there's a brochure about it we could find ". Called Florence, hoping to defuse Albert's mounting frustrations. He hadn't even touched his tea; it would be cold by now. Thought Florence, feeling slightly confused.

Florence had felt slightly confused mainly because she only ever felt slightly about anything. Even in the most extraordinary of circumstances. It's just one of those things age and routine brings.

Albert finally found his magnifying glass and comes back into the lounge room panting heavily and muttering obscenities under his breath. "Give me that thing! ". He demands, snatching the card from Florence he sits down on the settee, magnifying glass in hand.

Albert had to continuously pull focus to be able to read the card. Which, to his mounting disbelief and blood pressure, was saying exactly what Florence had told him and still he found it hard to grasp the gravity of the situation. (Pun intended.)

Mean while Florence watched on, thinking Albert looked kind of funny the way his head bobbed back and forth like an irate pigeon in the mating season. Puffing up his chest then emitting little gasps of frustrated steam as he affected focus with his magnifying glass, trying to read the card...

...Florence started to lose interest in the drama unfolding in front of her. It all hadn't made much sense; in fact she wasn't really sure what had started it all in the first place, her memory being a bit dodgy these days. She decided to clean up the tea things and leave Albert to his mumblings.

Albert was losing a bit of steam, still reading and rereading the card but had quietened down considerably.

Florence disappeared into the kitchen to the jingle jangle of the tea tray. Albert put down the magnifying glass and placed the card leaning against a vase on the coffee table. Then picking up the magnifying glass again he slumped back into

the settee, striking an almost comatose-like posture, magnifying glass in hand staring deeply in thought at the card...

Now you must remember deeply is a relative term when dealing with the likes of Albert Delaware.

Time ticked by...

Florence, wetex in hand, popped her head out from the kitchen to check on Albert. He was fast asleep. Which was, usually, what happened to him if he thought too much about anything in particular, for too long.

Albert's mouth was agape; air snuffling in and out, a trickle of dribble hanging from his chin rose and fell in time with his breathing. The card was still on the coffee table in the exact same place by the vase. The clock on the wall read 10:15 am.

It was almost time for the mail, thought Florence.

"That's if there was going to be any today". She muttered to no one in particular as she fed the goldfish, fingering fish flake into the fish tank next to the television.

The fish went into their usual feeding frenzy. Florence looked on with her usual degree of enthusiasm and wondered if Albert would wake in time to resume his normal routine and check the mail.

As if in response Albert belched in his sleep, shaking the bit of dribble loose, whipping it onto his right hand which was still limply holding the magnifying glass. Florence enjoyed the humour of the moment and giggled to herself.

It was coming up to 10.25am.

Florence acknowledged the clock and her previous light heartedness slid to a feeling of slight concern. Delaware routine was what their lives depended on and here it was fragmenting into... into chaos, deteriorating at a speed unknown before.

Florence's anxiety continued to grow....

There was a rattle at the front door. On hearing the noise she took a nervous glance over her shoulder and noted a small pile of three or so letters lying neatly on the carpet by the door. The mid morning mail had arrived and right on time too. Florence thought. Checking the clock, it was 10.30 on the dot. Albert didn't stir.

Florence's slight concern of five minutes ago now metamorphosed into a feeling of slight confusion. Not quite knowing what to do next. Should she go and make tea? Wait for Albert to talk again?

There was a cue missing so Florence had an almost uncontrollable urge to make tea, which after all was her part in their routine, and in the correct order, with respect to the mail arriving...

What to do...? What to do...? Wake Albert? She thought, looking his way, or go over to the front door and pick up the mail, although this seemed inappropriate, slightly

alien and once again quite beyond their well-established deeply etched routine. Her desire to make tea was becoming almost psychotic.

"Oh dear what a strange day" Florence exclaimed to the goldfish as she hovered mid lounge room in a haze of confusion over the need to make a decision.

"Oh dear", she said again. Wishing to confirm her predicament and hide from the obvious conclusion, being that she really did need to decide what to do, also the goldfish seemed somehow to be listening and looked genuinely interested.

Instinct guided by ritual got the better of her. Florence decided to make tea. In her mind she thought, not again as her body took off towards the kitchen, knocking the coffee table en route, sending the off white card sliding from its perch by the vase to the floor, landing at the reclining Albert's feet. They twitched. He was still asleep, but not for long...

## CHAPTER TWO. **THE MACHINE**

A huge thud from something very large being dropped outside on the street shook the whole house. Waking with a start Albert slipped from the settee onto the floor in one jarring movement. His foot kicking the card unnoticed underneath the settee and out of sight. He looks up at the agitated fish darting around in the still rippling water of the fish tank. The vase on the coffee table rocked back to equilibrium.

Florence appears at the kitchen door looking slightly frantic. Takes one, wide eyed, look at Albert then in synchronisation they both gawked towards the front door.

Albert plies himself from the floor and makes his way towards the door. Noticing the mail, he bends down, inspects it then nonchalantly tosses it onto a side table. Taking out his keys he nervously unlocks the front door.

By this time Florence is faithfully by his side, wetex in hand. They both peer out sheepishly...

So too do everyone else in the street. Other couples just like Albert and Florence line the doors of the houses on both sides of the Whale Street. All had a look of apprehension as they communally stared at the awesomely enormous mechanical device sitting in the middle of the road and a crane and a Mac truck driving off in the distance obscured by a mushrooming cloud of dust.

Thirty odd men in grey jump suits were running around the machine taking orders from a man in a blue jump suit. Who was obviously the commanding officer the way he barked out orders and strutted his stuff.

The neighbourhood population grew as residents came out and passers-by stopped to mingle and chat. Then before their eyes the machine too started to grow as extensions moved out and up, some flipping additional extensions out which in turn did the same again, a spectacular choreography of hydraulic arms, metal sections, men and unidentifiable machine parts.

Half an hour later a quarter of the street was taken up by something resembling a minimalist impression of a one hundred and fifty year history in railway engine design merged into one object, endowed with insect type antennae and gizmos hanging off in every direction all over the place. It was topped off with what looked like an oversized inverted beach umbrella. It seemed near completion, though not knowing what finished looked like left this open to individual speculation.

The men in overalls had stopped working and were relaxing around the machine in small groups. At least two hundred people, aside from the residents had gathered to view what most assumed to be the anti-gravity machine, giving the street an over crowded carnival atmosphere. At least a dozen police had been called in to control the milling masses. Who by now had all but obscured Albert and Florence's view.

Albert decided he'd had enough and went back indoors while Florence with her half dry wetex in hand bobbed and poked for fleeting glimpses of the main attraction. Albert noted this on his way in thinking she looked like a pigeon hassling for space in a Hyde Park flock. (Birds of a feather)

Albert turned on the television, and then made himself comfortable on the lounge. Oprah Winfrey's intellectually riveting program pulses from the screen. Albert relaxes further into the sedative he loved and needed.

It was just past noon. The hum of the crowds outside was constant, the whining of Oprah and her guests continued relentlessly as Albert drifted off to sleep which was consistent with his general zest for life.

It wasn't just an age thing with Albert it was more that he had never really run on all four cylinders in the first place and tired easily. His mind was, well mostly there and at times even enthusiasm surfaced but never coupled with anything remotely resembling energy. Sleep suited his posture and rigid routine his brain.

None the less, unbeknownst to both Albert and Florence fate and the cosmos were about to deal them a hand of opportunity and adventure, the ultimate unrest cure.

Florence finally lost any chance of a decent view so came back inside. She was curious why anyone would want to build a train museum in the middle of Whale Street and was slightly concerned about the additional traffic it might cause. She then forgot what she was thinking about as a new thought surfaced. 'It must be past lunch time'. She thought, passing his Royal Highness asleep in front of the telly.

Albert lay slouched on the settee oblivious to the rumblings emanating from his own vibrating gut.

Florence scooped up the mail and wandered through to the kitchen to prepare lunch. In between peeling potatoes and slicing beans she shuffles through the mail. One was obviously a bill another a mail order something. She opted for the least official looking envelope first and peeled it open with the potato knife. It was from her daughter Allison.



*Dear Mum and Dad,*

*We hope all is well on the home front. I just thought to drop you a quick line to remind you, not to say that you need reminding after our phone conversation last week but anyway I'm writing to remind you that it's that time of year again, holiday time and as usual Mark and Amanda will be making their way to your place around about noon Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup>...*

That's nice, thought Florence. The kids are coming to stay. She read on...

*...Don't worry about picking them up they have money for taxi and will make their own way to your place. If you have any problems we are contactable at the resort Hotel Kwantan Malaysia room 256, the phone number is Malaysia 106738. We'll send you a post card otherwise catch up with you to pick up the kids on the 26<sup>th</sup>.*

*Lots of love, Allison and Peter.*

Florence threw the letter onto the pile of potato peelings and slipped the empty envelope into her top pocket.

"Oh that's lovely", she muttered to the saucepan, filling it with water. "Allison and Peter off on holidays, mmm".

The sun was shining, lunch was cooking and all in all it was turning into quite a remarkable day. Florence thought, staring lazily out the window at the sun lit petunia patch in the backyard.

"Ahhh such bliss!" She exclaimed to her own reflection in the kitchen window.

Florence at times truly enjoyed her old age. She also had a capacity to block out all unwanted stimuli including the rumbling crowd noise from outside and the pathetic dramatics of the bold and the beautiful coming from the television in the lounge room. So there was nothing to interrupt this moment of sublime bliss enveloping her at the present. Not even the fact that today was Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup>, it had totally slipped her mind, nor that it was just past 1pm and that her grandchildren were about to make an entrance. Hadn't given it a second thought, hadn't remembered basically.

Albert slept on...

Outside in the Graviton, Captain Straten selects several buttons and barks into a microphone "Standby, five second test in 5, 4, 3, 2... He presses the test only button.

Inside 24 Whale Street a sleeping Albert, floats several centimetres into the air then back to the couch. Florence in the kitchen does the same but doesn't sense the experience being too preoccupied with her own thoughts.

## CHAPTER THREE. **THE PLOT THICKENS**

Albert dreamed of exotic climates surrounded by beautiful yet temperamental women. Temperamental because not even in his own dreams could Albert get it right. Anyway there he was in a potentially fantastic situation. Fully dressed in what appeared to be a pin stripped suite, on a beach, immaculate weather, women everywhere, beautiful gorgeous bikinied women- although none of them seemed interested in him no matter how hard he tried his best smile and most casual posturing. They seemed to be in a different world- their voices coming from a distance. Sometimes drifting out of synchronisation, and always, always obsessed with some problem or another to do with money, men, weight or other women.

Albert was totally unaware his dream was being dictated by the toing and froing of soapy stars and their scriptwriters via his Sony Trinitron. Still a dream was a dream and Albert was enjoying himself in a bazaar sort of a way. The drinks were good and on the house as far as he knew. At least the tall leggy blonde bringing a never-ending supply of them never asked for any money. She just ranted on about one drama after another.

When she next arrived with his drink she shoved it at him, spilling half of it across his tuxedo- (somehow he was now wearing a tux), She was babbling on about... 'Never wanting to see him again 'then swung around with an exaggerated flourish, storming off in disgust. Still Albert knew she would be back. Suicidal next time maybe, but never the less he did have some control in his own dream, if only over the drink flow rate.

A ringing sound started to cut its way through into Albert's manufactured dream sequence. He made an effort to look around the beach for its source but eyed only palm trees and girls, sand and more girls. (It was kind of obsessive) then as the ringing got louder he swung himself off the beach chair to investigate further...

Crunch!!!

...Albert landed with a jarring thud, his chin sitting dog like on the coffee table the rest of him in a twisted pile draping from the settee. The television, a metre away, blared in his ears as the doorbell died in the distance.

Florence announces "I'll get it ", and makes for the front door.

Albert unravelled his twisted legs, pulled himself upright and back onto the settee, then leaned over blearily and switched off his dream machine. Then sat back rubbing his eyes. Chubby fists rotating back and forth in the meaty crevasses containing rolling eye balls, squishing here and there in their own sea of fluids and veins.

He rubbed and rubbed, washing away the best parts of his dreams.

After this little ceremony Albert felt much less fuzzy headed than normal and indeed refreshed, if not somewhat aroused. Certainly able to handle whoever had arrived at the door.

The sing song speech of welcoming filled the house as Florence ushered Mark, Amanda and luggage through the front door into the lounge room. Albert thought he recognised the voices but couldn't be sure.

"Look dear, it's Mark and Amanda, they've come to visit "Florence announced.

Albert went into animated action the instant he realised who had arrived and leapt out of the settee, arms outstretched to embrace his grandchildren. Marks response was to shelter behind his sister and cringe, holding tightly to his luggage as though this senile old man was going to mug him.

Amanda had a better handle on the situation and side stepped to the left at the last moment leaving Mark vulnerable to the charging assault of his grandfather. Who, picked him up in one decrepit swoop and smacked a big wet bristly kiss on his cheek. Mark wasn't impressed.

Amanda stood by with a suitable grin on her face which collapsed the moment she saw her grandfather release Mark and turn towards her.

In Amanda's eyes Albert had a loving yet somewhat maniacal look about him which reminded her of some character from a late night B grade horror film. She was definitely not looking forward to the inevitable crusty old kiss and cuddle. It came- she squirmed a little but basically gave into this embrace of grand parental love.

"What an unexpected pleasure to see you both ". Albert said, releasing a relieved Amanda.

Albert stepped back to take them both in.

"Off on a trip or something by the look of it? ". Albert eyed their luggage then glanced Florence's way.

"Didn't you talk with Muu.. ". Attempted Amanda before Florence cut her off, saying to Albert.

"Well dear it seems to have slipped my mind, now that I come to think about it, um there was a letter this morning and well I'm not too sure but possibly a phone call from Allison last week.. ".

Florence still had the half-dry wetex in her hands, which she twisted eternally, in short tense bursts searching for a suitable explanation to the sudden arrival of their grand children.

"...and it's been such an exciting day what with what ever it was that's been happening, happening.. ".

She had totally forgotten about the pending gravity service...

"And now that the weather seems to be turning out just fantastically..."

Albert turned his eyes to the ceiling in a gesture of hopelessness. The children were holding back giggles as Florence continued to babble.

"Any way dear it's not that I'm particularly forgetful, it's just that things build up at such a startling rate and I cant, frankly.. ". She pauses for no apparent reason then seems to get back on track mind wise. Looking lovingly at the children she continues. "What's the difference they're here now anyway ".

"Yeah and for ten days!" exclaims Mark.

Albert turned his eyes to the ceiling in a repeat of his previous gesture then smiled at the children. Florence happy that Albert was happy set off to the kitchen to prepare tea (yet again) and sandwiches thinking it would be nice to have lunch in the backyard for a change, it being such a beautiful day and all.

"Come on lets get this stuff stowed away in the spare room" said Albert to the children, putting on a dreadful sailor's accent, while picking up the closest bag in his right hand attempting to scruff Mark's hair with the other. Mark dodged and said something like 'piss off you old fart' under his breath then clambered up and over the arm of the settee, bag in hand, he headed towards the spare room.

Albert laughed and faked a left hand jab followed by a right hand uppercut which connected accidentally with his own jaw nearly knocking him off his feet- more by surprise than impact, surprise that he had managed to belt himself in the face. Amanda ran giggling, virtually wetting herself, into the spare room after her brother.

Mark, who had also seen Albert belt himself was currently rolling on the floor in stitches, tears running down his face.

"Grandpa you're such a hoon" he muttered in-between bursts of uncontrollable laughter bellowing from the two convulsing siblings on the floor.

Albert licked his bloodied lip with good humour not really realising that they were taking the mickey out of him. He put it all down to youthful exuberance as he dragged the last bag to the entrance of the spare room.

"Catch you in the backyard for lunch in five". Albert said feeling sort of groovy as he headed off, with a spring in his step, to the kitchen to help Florence, which was quite unusual for him.

Amanda, who was really hurting by now, regained some degree of composure and spluttered.

"OK Grandad, coool" carrying on the game.

Mark had recovered somewhat, sitting on the bed with a Mickey Mouse grin which stretched from ear to ear, head nodding acknowledgement like a dog or in this case a rat on the rear sill of a 1960's car. He turned towards his sister, who was now back to her normal gracious, self-contained self. "Ten days with these two, how totally uncool, I can't wait till your old enough to take care of the both of us at holiday time.. ".

Mark paused to think, and then continued...

"What do you reckon was happening outside? What with all those people, you'd think there'd been a rock concert"

"Maybe it was a riot! Or possibly it was the left overs of a particularly big soccer crowd." Amanda Replied.

"Nah I don't think so, not enough blood and brawling "stated Mark, digging into his bag looking for the last of the lollies. Which he knew was there somewhere. He finally found one and popped it in his mouth, sucking with corporeal relish for Amanda's benefit, knowing full well that it was the last one.

Amanda looked on with a veil of discipline which didn't suit her and certainly didn't convince Mark who continued to suck the sweet, blissing out, just waiting for Amanda to crack. Which, of course she did.

"Well I should think you'd offer me one ". Amanda insisted.

Mark stuck out his tongue with the last lolly delicately perched temptingly on its tip, then whipped it, lolly and all back into his mouth. "Tough, it's the last one" he said, his Mickey Mouse grin breaking from ear to ear yet again.

Mark loved to get one up on his sister; in fact one up on anyone was his preferred state. At least up to the point where the victim would attempt to hit him in the head out of frustration, which is exactly what Amanda did as she swung her bag around connecting convincingly with Mark's head. He gasped, spitting the lolly flying out of his mouth, across the carpet, bouncing out into the lounge room.

Amanda packed up in hysterics again, rolling hopelessly on the floor as Mark wandered off, totally defeated, towards the kitchen. So inflated he didn't even bother to look for his half sucked lolly which had managed to land under the settee sticking itself to the little off white card which had found it's way underneath the settee earlier on today.

The off white card which Florence and Albert had forgotten about and the children knew nothing about in the first place, the little card which would have explained to Mark the reason for the now diminishing crowds outside. The card which basically said, that love it or lump it, in twenty five minutes the gravity would be turned off for routine maintenance.

Albert and Florence's memory's could have done with some routine maintenance over the years but obviously had never got any.

## CHAPTER FOUR. **WHAT GOES UP... GOES UP**

Tea was served on the white plastic mono mould picnic table out on the lawn in the backyard, which was rimmed by petunias and flashes of purple from an early flowering wisteria. The sky was a crispy blue, there was a soft breeze riding the air interrupted occasionally by twittering birds.

The crowd noise from outside had died out completely. Everyone having gone home to prepare or having been ordered out of the official no go area by council security officers.

"It's just perfect picnic weather" Florence announced to the children making their way into the yard. Albert already at the picnic table, sat there contemplating his cup and saucer. The children jostled for the chair in the sun, Mark gets it with regained confidence. They sit down. Albert pours the tea while Florence dishes up sufficient sandwich servings to all. They commenced eating.

Time went by slowly. As it can do sometimes...

If anybody had bothered to look at the time, which none of them had done, then they would have seen that it was now 2.30, and if Albert and Florence had had access to just a modicum of memory cells they would have been prepared for what was about to happen but they weren't. Consequently none of them were prepared for what started to happen when Captain Staten fired up the graviton.

At first the air began to tingle a little, just barely noticeably... Then small things like dead leaves and crumbs on plates started to lift very... very... slowly into the air... No one said anything. They were all mesmerised by the strange feeling, a bazaar unknown sensation surrounding and affecting every perception and sense. Spontaneously everyone cracked a smile then started to giggle as they felt themselves getting unexplainably lighter.

Amanda's long hair animated, climbing up her shoulders, till her ears were revealed. Looking like she had received an electric shock. In fact everyone's hair was standing on end trying to escape their skulls.

Before long, plates and slightly heavier things from the table joined the general heavenly exodus. Which now included; sticks, leaves, ants and other smallish insects, an array of empty seedling pots, three loose clothe pegs, bits of paper and a fine mist of dust mixed with tiny sods of soil.

From the pond a small body of water started to lift from the surface followed by two pop eyed, mouth gulping goldfish, that looked like a couple of stunned mullet. The list goes on, as everything on it headed upwards.

"What's happening?" Mark cried out, finally finding his voice and breaking the silence, his wide eyes searching his sisters.

"I've got no idea! Mind you it feels sort of fun, I think I'm going to fly in a second ". Amanda makes flying gestures with her arms.

Then Albert and Florence simultaneously freeze, locked in a moment of comprehension, of blind realisation. Starring at each other with a look which said... "Oh my god!, the little off white card!!!"

A half-eaten plate of sandwiches drifted up past Albert's nose. He tracked it with his eyes until they rolled so far up into his head all you could see were the whites. The

sandwiches along with just about every thing else that wasn't fastened down disappeared up through the treetops, up, up and away into the ether. "Aah... Listen Mark, Amanda um there's something we neglected to tell you," attempts Albert. "...In fact we just plain forgot ourselves but you see we got this little off white card through the front door this morning telling us...".

Albert stopped mid-sentence and looked dumbfounded at the children. Both Mark and Amanda had started to lift into the air at a slow yet steady pace followed a moment later by Florence and their chairs. Then Albert sensed his own backside leave the curve of his mono moulded chair and defy gravity, as he too, went up, off and away.

First Albert tried to grab at the air for control but to no avail. Then he attempted frantically to grab his chair which was following him half a meter behind. All he managed to do was kick it with an out of control foot, sending the chair ricocheting off the lawn below, then away on its own upward trajectory, out of reach.

Everyone was looking at the totally distracted Albert with varying degrees of urgency. Albert senses their stares, snapping back to the here and now he continued.

"... The gravity would be turned off this afternoon for routine maintenance, at.. aah two thirty, wasn't it dear?", looking at Florence for support and conformation.

"Well that's just great" said Mark from on high.

"Shouldn't we grab hold of something and think about this for awhile" suggests Amanda, attempting to grab a passing branch of a tree.

She finally gets a firm grip on the end of a branch but her legs keep floating up until she circles upside-down.

Albert attempts to do the same with the same result. It was so disorienting, both of them let go, continuing on their upward journey, but now upside down. Albert left a trail of floating coins which had rolled out of his pockets. Amanda giggling and wiggling managed to right herself and seemed to be enjoying the experience. Mark and Florence have almost cleared the trees; they are level with the gable of the neighbour's roof and a good two meters higher than Albert and Amanda.

"What can we do" cried out Florence to anyone who might have a suitable suggestion. She was starting to spin a little uncontrollably and had covered her eyes with her hands.

"I'm not particularly good with heights" risking a peep through her fingers.

Albert is relatively calm as he wafts by their bedroom window. He peers in, eyeing their wedding photograph floating above the dressing table. On hearing Florence's cry for help he looks up. On seeing Florence, her eyes covered spinning slightly out of control something mustered within him. With heroic intentions he calls out.

"Hold on dear I'm coming".

Albert then started making, ridiculous, frog like gyrations with his arms and legs trying to affect the air and make his way closer to her. All he succeeded in doing was to tire himself out and send the kids back into fits of laughter.

A temporarily defeated Albert floated on deflated. Then seeing a garden hose come drifting by an idea struck him. He reaches over calmly and takes hold of the floating garden hose then calls out.

"Hey everyone Listen up! I've got an idea! There is no use us all just drifting up and off all over the place so while there's still time let's link up with this here garden hose".

Albert felt very organised now and let loose with a tirade of instructions.

"Mark! You're up the highest so if I toss it up to you, so "... He does. The hose slow mo's through the air straight to Mark who catches it.

"That's it, now thread it under your belt and tie it off, OK, throw the other end over to Florence - Florence you grab hold... Yep, right now Florence tie your scarf around the hose and then your waist... Good, yes lower it down to Amanda and...Good, great, now Amanda have you got enough hose left to get it back to me?"...

Amanda puts it through her belt and sends the nozzle end to Albert who ties off. Our fantastic four now umbilical-ly linked by the garden hose continue on their journey upwards, there was just no way out of it. There was no other way to go.

## CHAPTER FIVE. **MEAN WHILE... BACK DOWN ON THE GROUND.**

Down below in the Graviton an alarm bell was ringing madly. In the operations area half a dozen frantic technicians are extinguishing an electrical fire. Things weren't looking too good. In the control room the commanding officer was balling out some poor subordinate for not doing something, which had sent the machine into some sort of fit, which in turn blew out a number of critical circuit boards, causing the fire. The commanding officer turns away from the subordinate and walks over to the communications console, punches digits on a keypad then speaks into a microphone.

"Gravtwo to base ... Gravtwo to base, are you receiving out..."

"Base to gravtwo, what can we do for you Captain Straten?"

"We've had a major malfunction and have lost control of the amount of displaced energy needed to affect safe routine maintenance in zero or close enough gravity. The machine is stuck on maximum; I require a experienced graviton emergency repair crew and soon!..." He paused, then for effect added. "We potentially have a national disaster on our hands ". He turns towards the cringing subordinate hedged in a corner, slicing him with knife eyes as he waited for a reply... It came...

"General Thoecomber here..., that is very disappointing news Captain Straten or was that Corporal "said the new, sarcastic yet sophisticated voice. "We'll get a repair crew out to you as soon as possible in the mean time sit tight and don't touch anything... Got it! ".



Captain Straten cringed at the speaker but stood to attention never the less with a...  
"Sir yes sir "before switching off.

In the background the graviton played on with a droning semi musical montage of strange harmonics and subterranean sounds, half-mixed with underwater bubble and popping noises.

In a very esoteric way the machine felt a new kind of freedom, no longer was it being dictated to by the button pushing machinations of man. It felt free to do exactly what it wanted, which basically was to turn off all the gravity in the immediate area and beyond, if possible, indefinitely.

There was no vindictiveness in the Graviton's intentions, it's just that the damage done had gridlocked all system modes except maximum and in maximum no gravity mode - it being an anti-gravity machine and all, well, maximum no gravity was what it was doing and indeed it was doing it well.

All residents (except the Delaware's and grandchildren) were safe in their houses, having taken notice of the little off white card; they were prepared for the routine gravity maintenance but not necessarily for a prolonged zero gravity disaster.

The Whale Street residents had been quite innovative in their eclectic approaches at making their homes safe, secure and zero gravity proof. Some had strapped themselves into chairs nailing the legs into the floorboards, armed with a good supply of books. Others were tucked underneath their stairwells with a thermos of tea sealed by a cork with a straw through it for hassles free zero gravity drinking. Or had squeezed into cupboards, packet of biscuits in hand, watching their chained down televisions, after having roped up their dog or cat, placing them into old dryers and back toilets. Goldfish were shoved unceremoniously into plastic bags full of water and tanks drained.

Prior to securing themselves everyone had stuffed newspapers into any vacant space left in cupboards and refrigerators to stop things floating about. Then, in a final frenzy just before 2.30, had wrapped and stuck down anything else left unsecured in their homes, using several kilometres of sticky tape, masking tape, packing tape, electrical tape and blu-tac.

The Smithereens down at number 57 had no tape at all so used string and wool, unwound from a couple of old jumpers. The interior of their house now resembled a frenetic multi coloured spider's web spun by a rather hung over spider but at least their property was safe.

Not one of the Whale Street residences wanted to take any chances. Not when it came to gravity and certainly not when it came to the local council.

Over at the Delaware's it was a different story. Nothing at all had been secured, consequently there was total chaos. Furniture and nic nacs, food, clothes, water, the

television, a little off white card. Absolutely everything was floating around, bopping and bouncing about in slow motion confusion.

A couple of goldfish, trying to huddle together around a globule of water bounced off the ceiling then banged into a spinning vase. They were looking bruised and confused as they bounced, yet again, this time off the wall and out of sight through an open window, up and away to join their fellow fish out of water.

The whole house was so dense with floating things, you could hardly see from one end of the lounge room to the other. A scene remanisant of one of those clear plastic domes containing water and a miniature city or a Christmas scene that when shook sent a flurry of miniature snow flakes in all directions. The place was a mess of slow motion movement.

Back inside the graviton, the fire is out and the crew is relaxing in what little space was available. The operations area within the graviton was somewhat like the interior of a submarine, cramped, claustrophobic and sealed to the outside world to retain a normal gravity environment. In the control room Captain Straten sat, stony faced, by the microphone waiting for the rescue team to arrive. The disgraced subordinate had managed to slip away discreetly and was hiding at the rear of the machine in an attached port-loo, no doubt he was thinking of using it as well.

Captain Straten alone at the control desk noticed four strange blips amongst a bunch of just plain old blips on the radar screen in front of him. He took note of the time and their vitals: position, speed and trajectory, just in case at a later date they'd prove to be important (which coincidentally they did) then dismissed them as background static.

Later on in his life, Captain Straten would regret not taking more notice of those four tiny blips. For on many a sleepless night he would lie awake and ponder whether or not he was in some small way responsible for the strange disappearance of two thirds of the Delaware family all those years ago. How could he have known and what could anyone have done to bring them back down again even if he had reported the blips, which according to the rulebook he should have done. This simple mistake gave his superiors a reason to strip him of his rank. Blaming him for the whole affair they farmed him off to the mail-sorting department where not too many years later he was given a meagre redundancy package then was unceremoniously banish from council employment altogether. It could be a cruel world sometimes, he would never again enjoy another Thursday or any other day for as long as he would live, a very depressing thought.

For now all of this was yet to happen so his future and the four strange blips were the farthest things from his mind as he sat there, transfixed, daydreaming about the past, a ceremony at which he'd received his captain stripes. It was a favourite daydream in which he indulged regularly. He found it a relaxing way to fill in time; it also gave him positive re-enforcement and re-affirmed his position in life. Captain Straten a formidable commander.

His current position in life was waiting for the rescue team to arrive and the inevitable bawling out by General Thocomber. This thought brought him back to earth... Straten peered out the window at a sky full of chaos above a deserted street. Leaning forward he could just make out the barricaded crowds and a wall of floating debris down the far end of Whale Street, he wondered what was happening, there was no sign of the rescue team as yet.

The machine pulsed on...

The area affected by the graviton was approximately one kilometre square with Whale Street being the epicentre. Police and council officials had set up a complex array of fencing and manned barricades to hold back the inquisitive masses who were all trying to test the strength of the antigravity area by tossing gradually larger objects into it, to watch them arch up and float into the sky. Live cigarette butts, chip packets, cans, rocks, fence palings an old tire, somebody's letterbox, several small fur trees uprooted from someone's front yard one containing a totally freaked out cat glued to the trunk in fear of falling off. Birds would fly innocently into the antigravity area losing control, tumbling helplessly upward as they too became gravity victims and floated away.

Just inside the barricade at the far end of Whale Street a couple of loutish looking teenagers were swinging their mate's pushbike back and forth gaining momentum till they let it fly. The police and several bystanders had to hold the mate back from going over the fence to retrieve it as the bike disappeared into the sky and the teenagers into the crowd trailing bursts of hoots and laughter. More people arrived, attracted by the haze of floating debris, more rubbish was thrown into the air consequently the sky immediately above the fenced off perimeter was fast becoming a cluttered mess of junk, obscuring totally the Delaware's upward flight from people's view.

Additional council security officers and police were brought in to contain the ever growing crowd but were unable to stop them from having their jollies as more and more flotsam and jetsam joined the upward exodus.

Against all odds a sharp-eyed twelve-year-old boy spotted the Delaware's through the sea of floating garbage. They had just appeared over the top of their roof. He couldn't believe his eyes and ran home to pick up the family video camera. Returning he fired up the camera. Scanned for the floating four, found them, zoomed in, and focused then for posterity captured the Delaware's journeying on high. Even on maximum zoom the Delaware's were fairly small in the viewfinder, the boy being some distance away from them. Never the less he could definitely make out four people joined by what looked like rope, floating upwards at a slow yet constant pace, a couple of 100 meters away and some 40 meters off the ground in an ocean of human refuse.

He filmed until the tape ran out then took off to the local television station with his scoop of the day in hand, the key to his future success and besides the Delaware's were now just another group of specks in a speck ridden sky.

This half hour video would end up being the only documented proof of the final known whereabouts of the Delaware's and would, over the next two weeks or so, be flashed around the global news network...

'The Delawares fly out!! ' An incredible tale, an almost unbelievable story '... 'An inexcusable man-made tragedy'...'A message to all councils about the dangers of gravity maintenance'...'Stricter controls and better education was needed '...'A multi-million dollar compensation claim by Peter and Allison Delaware '... Mimicked news readers in nearly every language supported by photo exposes and tearful interviews with Peter and Allison who were as one would expect totally beside themselves with grief and bewilderment at what had happened. Naturally the interviewers played on this to the full. It all made for terrific television.

The twelve-year-old boy's half hour video would also be the starting point for a very successful career. It was the boy's first sale. He was astute enough to retain some points and would one day become the biggest communication magnate the planet has ever seen but that's another story and this one has only just begun.

The reason why Captain Straten had started to feel stranded was because he was.

You see something, very, unexpected had happened. As the debris was carried aloft it sooner or later came to space, i.e. no gravity, equilibrium as such. The area affected on the ground by no gravity was no more than a kilometre square. By the time it had reached space though, it had splayed out like a fluted vase and was some three kilometres square. The net result being that an awful lot of the muck tossed in by the crowds earlier on, had started to peel off around the edges of the affected area, gaining gravity and momentum it showered back down to earth onto unsuspecting suburbanites and in some cases onto the original initiators.

Amidst the crazed, ascending, exodus from the ravaged neighbourhood scores of injuries were reported, several critical. A couple of loutish looking teenagers received terrible injuries when a pushbike landed on top of them, one wheel each. A local politician was knocked senseless by what was now a rather flat cat embossed over a gridded drain just to the left of its victim.

The police and council officials futile attempts to clear the ever growing landing area, along with the still out of control graviton had once again caused unnecessary loss of life, massive public concern and a major feed for the world media, those in opposition and the t-shirt trade.

Whale Street's surroundings looked like a war zone only instead of relentless bombardments on confused dazed civilians it was a cascade of urban debris and to some extent instant karma.

## **UFO'S? NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO BELIEVE.**

On high the Delaware's were faring quite well considering their peculiar circumstances. Florence had fainted from fear of heights and disorientation, half an hour ago and 50 meters up. Albert had gently hosed her in. She was currently comfortably cradled in Albert's capable arms.

To the kids it was a dream come true. Just imagine... Flying, and had been occupying their time by spotting local and then regional places of interest from their continually elevating vantage point. They were now preoccupied with catching and swapping an array of objects plucked from the sky as they went floating by and aside from the growing cold and thinning air seemed unaffected and were actually enjoying themselves.

Albert as always was all front, he was playing the stoic, in control yet really totally out of control, patriarch. Mostly for Florence and the children's sake as well as to keep himself preoccupied with something other than the immediate, which was of course that they the hosed together foursome, were all hurtling on upwards, ad infinitum, and were now at a height of some three thousand meters and still rising.

Inside Albert's exterior of strength and confidence a wild brooding concern manifested. He knew that the higher they went the less oxygen there would be and that the already freezing temperature, would continue to plummet. Florence's extremities; nose tip, fingers and ears now flushed with the bluish hue of oxygen starvation. So too were his own and the children's. Florence felt cold to the touch as did he.

At around four and a half thousand meters an eerie silence fell over them all. The children had stopped playing their games, floating on in silence as the cold really started to bite and breathing became increasingly difficult.

Mark and Amanda, scared and trembling uncontrollably from the cold look desperately to Albert for reassurance. Their predicament had finally sunk in. This was no longer fun and games.

Albert attempts a confident smile but by now his own resolve was crumbling as his concern for Florence's well-being started to dominate his emotions. Tears swelled in his eyes then floated off, around his head and away, to become frozen droplets of glistening pearls.

Was it all about to end, up here, like this!

Amanda pulled at the hose bringing Mark close enough for her to grab him. They embraced silently for warmth and companionship as it too, dawned on them that this may well be it.

Albert was the next to black out still embracing Florence, an inseparable frozen moment. The children were speechless and even if they could find their voices what

was there to say. Their brains started to fuzz over. The cold turned into a numb nothingness. Mark faded first followed a few seconds later by Amanda.

All four unconscious now, Mark and Amanda's strangely open eyes, reflected the sun light, sparkling, giving them an unearthly look of life and enthusiasm. Albert and Florence appeared simply to be embracing in a frozen, cosy sleep.

They all ascended rather delicately towards the stars and to, what one would assume to be, certain death.

You are probably sitting there totally devastated at the thought that such an unreasonably thing could happen to such an amiable unassuming couple as the Delaware's and that how unfortunate it was for Amanda and Mark to have arrived at their grandparents at such an inappropriate moment. It is sad! Rotten bad timing...

So is it truly going to end here?

The air around the Delaware's started to shimmer and glow, and then mysterious faintly coloured swirling patterns started to envelope them and intensify in movement and chroma. The floating debris, which surrounded them, simultaneously disintegrated without a sound creating a mild air turbulence which buffeted our still unconscious travellers who were almost totally encased in, what was now, a brightly coloured never-ending Mandelbrot-like design crystallist.

The display wrapped ever tighter and tighter around the contours of their bodies until finally they were cocooned altogether. Then, suddenly, a strange greenish column of light penetrated through the heavens striking the multi coloured bell bar which contained our hero's, spiriting them away at great speed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN. **BELIEVE... IF YOU DIDN'T BEFORE YOU WILL NOW.**

The four desolated denizens of time and space, along with tons of floating debris flashed off radar screens across the region. Thousands of eyewitnesses starred goggle eyed in disbelief at the now clear blue mid-afternoon sky above Whale Street. There wasn't a cloud in sight, yet it started snowing lightly. In the distance the graviton could be heard, like an aeroplane de-accelerating after landing, grinding to a halt. It made one last mechanical belch, followed by a long exhaling fffzzzzz, and then stopped dead...

The snow stopped too... Then silence...

The silence of post shock...

Absolute...

Frozen...

Time seemed suspended though in actual fact several minutes had passed...

Defrosting emergency services, waiting around the perimeter, started to move cautiously forward into the three kilometre wide anti-gravity blast zone. The outer

reaches were a total mess. The mess decreased the closer they got to the graviton. Binoculars from on top a block of flats showed the area immediately around the graviton to be spotless, sucked clean it seems.

At a near by Airforce helicopter base specially trained government troops sprang into action and were airlifted directly to the graviton where they exploded out of the helicopter, took up arms and set up guard, with orders to let no one in and especially no one out.

Next teams of scientists and their assistants, gadgets in hand, button pushing, knob twitching, liquid crystals flashing, specialist in one field or another converged on the epicentre, the now heavily guarded silent graviton.

Hordes of white coated, perplexed looking, analysing, sampling, digging, scratching, climbing over and scouring through men and women madly trying, (as scientists tend to do) to decipher the exact cause of the disaster, aside from the obvious incompetence of local council.

Many having witnessed the final stages of the phenomena were banding around the idea of cosmic intervention as the most likely cause, though this hypothesis was based on lack of knowledge and sheer disbelief, and not on any tangible evidence, as yet.

As night fell a pack of bulldozers, finally, cleared a path through to the graviton and its sentries. The bulldozers were then backed out and trucks, luggers, lights and more troops brought in. Lights and generators were instantly rigged and fired up, brightly illuminating the entire area. Paper work and signatures were exchanged, relieving the responsibly from the sentry's to the new troops.

The graviton crew was taken away but not before witnessing Captain Straten, eyes lowered and whimpering some what like a distressed puppy, being striped of his rank then bundled into a car and whisked away for further questioning, more public humiliation and ultimately the post office.

The graviton was then professionally dismantled by an expert demolition team supervised by very, very official looking men in dark suits wearing sun glasses (who seem to have appeared from out of no where). The graviton parts were sealed in boxes, loaded leisurely by luggers and freighted to a top secret location for further scrutinization by those who should have some answers.

The Delaware's house was boarded up, then after a discreet briefing by the dark suites, two security guards were set up outside, one in the back yard, the other by the front door.

The new troops, luggers, demolition team all disappeared just as quickly as they had arrived, as too did the graders, trucks, lights and sundry heavy equipment. Leaving in their wake a cloud of fine dust mushrooming out from and around Whale Street, - a few dissolving shadowy figures in sunglasses, - the security guards, -

sundry scientists and a small group of six or so people, officially dressed in council grey, wandering the streets. Each holding a loud hailer in one hand while reciting from a note pad with clip on light, grasped firmly in the other. Announcing repetitively...

"This is an offic..i.a.l annou.nn.cement... gravity has re.sumed!  
Things are no..or..mal again! All is now ...s.afe...  
... And thank you for your co..op.er.at.ion..."  
"This is an offi.cial ann.ounce.ment...grav.ity has re..sumed!  
Things are no.rmal again.... "

And so on, ad infinitum into the night...

The dazed and confined Whale Street community did a good job of deciphering the phonetic babble coming from the 'council grey' illiterates and commenced untying, unsticking, withdrawing and un-attaching themselves, their pets and much loved objects, in an attempt to get their homes back to a semblance of order.

Having originally prepared themselves well for the gravity maintenance, most got things underway speedily. Each eager to cook up their long awaited dinners and enjoy a restful sleep. Nobody realising that neither of these things would be possible, for several very good reasons firstly there was no power, gas or running water and once again there was a growing commotion rumbling outside guaranteeing a noisy night ahead.

Whale Street was yet again, filling up fast. News crews, t-shirt salesmen, souvenir mug-spruikers, looters and other opportunists replaced - the scientists who had wandered off, deep in conversation carrying little bags and boxes containing snowflakes and other specimens. - And the grey council hailers who had packed it in once the batteries in their reading lights had given out, so they couldn't read their lines. - There wasn't a sign of the shadowy suites, though one could never truly know.

The security guard out the front of the Delaware's was being inundated by a foaming gaggle of eager news hounds all desperately seeking that unique angle on the Whale Street floating family disaster.

The guard, being under extra special orders to keep a tight lip, especially over things he knew nothing about, found himself fending off the most benign and ridiculous questions...

"What colour were the original curtains? What did you eat for lunch? "  
He ummed and arred...  
"What shoe size was Albert? "  
He looked up, smiled, shuffling from foot to foot...  
"Did they keep regular hours? "  
He looked down again thinking I can't believe this!  
"Was there a lover involved? "



The guard then blanked out, a sort of temporarily solution, meditative amidst the pressed fury; a glazed gaze look came over his eyes. His head lifted slowly until upright, pallid faced, eyes oblivious and silent, his only means of defence against the relentless media drivel.

The oblivious press pressed on for fifteen more minutes before finally realising that there was no joy to be found here, and headed off to harass the neighbours.

All in all Whale Street was more alive than it had ever been and to think Albert, Florence and the kids were missing out on all this. Or were they?

## CHAPTER EIGHT. **DIAMONDS?... FLOWERS & SHOELACES?**

There was no tunnel and bright white light. No mysterious voice calling from afar beckoning him closer. Albert simply floated on... Totally at ease, strangely bodiless, yet absolutely in place, as though he was there for a reason, only he had, no memory of prior events and no idea of the reason.

Albert felt his bodiless self-continuing to float upwards, up through the Earth's atmosphere, out past the moon. He marvelled at the detail of its crated surface.

The earth and moon shrank into insignificance as he journeyed further, past Mars and her moons, Jupiter, through the rings of Saturn, increasing speed all the while. Pluto flashes by. Faster still as colossal Uranus zips away... out into an eternal space teeming with stars, speckled by galaxies... Into an unfamiliar space, as he watched the Milky Way diminish until it too, was only one of thousands of star filled galaxies across his field of vision.

Albert was now travelling at an incredible speed. The scenic cruise powered by some unknown cosmic current was taking him deeper and deeper into space. Until even the clustered galaxies shrank into oblivion and he found himself, wafting along, in a huge almost black void speckled in the far distance by, what were now, tiny clusters of misty illuminations, filled with millions of galaxies. In turn filled by billions of stars and, to think, one of those stars somewhere way back there was Earth and 24 Whale Street and his couch and television. It was a fantastic notion! Still Albert felt in control and euphorically at ease. Utopiacally so.

Time past...

Albert sensed himself slowing down. His trajectory, up until now, a single curving spline, began to unglulate, as though he was floating on top of a slowed down waving radio signal. Up ... Then... Down... Up... and down, gracefully, balletic...

Out of the almost darkness Albert's attention was taken by one small yet bright star, way, way off in the distance. As he flew closer, the star increased in luminance and size, out glowing any other space phenomenon, then like sunlight through a diamond it sparkled, sending star fields in all directions, mildly illuminating the otherwise pitch black space in which Albert was immersed. He squinted a few times, eyes adjusting to the sudden additional light.

Then something else started slowly dissolving into view.....

Albert thought he could just make out a thin band of dusty gold which the light seemed to be emanating from, the dusty gold particles gradually gathered together growing more dense... clearer... forming something additional to the light source ... and...

Yes! Things became eerily obvious. It appeared to be an enormous, diamond sitting on a gold ring in the middle of now where...

A very familiar looking ring, thought Albert. Dismissing it as quickly as he had had it, the thought that is. Another one replaced it... A wedding ring floating in space!?

The closer Albert got to the ring the more he felt the urge to reach out towards it. Considering the ring seemed a hundred kilometres away and he had no arms, this ultimately felt fairly senseless. All he could do was too keep on watching, in an armless sort of way as he wafted along on the undulating cosmic breeze.

Next, ever so gradually, a ghost like finger began to dissolve into view, until it filled out the empty space surrounding the ring. Then more detail appeared around the finger and ring, until Albert was confronted by a gigantic hand!!??

"This is fantastic!" He exclaimed, in his head. "What is a gigantic hand doing floating around in the...," What Albert assumed to be, 'the... deepest of the deep in the way of space.

Albert's mind heads off on a tangent...

"...And what an absolutely enormous hand and what was it doing way out here in the middle of god knows where??

No...But...could ...this... Be... The hand of...?... No... No...?? "

The hand now almost filled his total field of vision as still more detail came into view. ...the hand was attached to an arm...and... ?

A floral patterned sleeve belonging to...?

A floral patterned...? ... Dress?

And a...?

...Flurry of blonde hair which belonged to the face of...?

...A very young version of his wife!?... It was Florence!!

Albert drifted in and out consciousness. Somewhere between intergalactic space and the here and now, one minute he'd be cradled in Florence's lap, eyes fixed on the wedding ring he had given her many years ago, the next moment he'd be floating in a hazy cosmos.

"... What was Florence doing here? "

Consciousness started taking hold. Propping himself up on one arm Albert looked around. There was grass? and trees? and his grandchildren?

Albert's cosmic experience, finally, totally faded away, replaced by the reality of lying cradled on Florence's lap in a rather lovely forest with the children, comfortably leaning, one against a mossy log, and the other a tree stump. The children were making the first signs of coming to. Eyes flittering in the sunlight, arms stretching, scratching, rubbing, more squinting, and looking around.

Albert didn't interrupt them. He just looked on. His mind chocoblock full of thoughts.

How real the giant hand in space had felt and how amazing his cosmic journey had been and of how small the experience had made him feel, how cosmically disposable, insignificant. Though on the other hand, he felt amazingly at ease with it all, coupled with only two niggling thoughts sort of bothering him.

Why me?. Why us? Referring to Florence and the kids, and what's happening!?

Albert leans over and touches Florence's hand, her eyes open lazily accompanied by a welcoming smile emanating from a youthful revitalised face.

Florence looked fantastic! Young, curvaceous, that special sparkle of youth back in her eyes.

Albert investigates his own, usually well folded and saggy neck and finds nothing but taut firm flesh, the sort of skin he had had when in his twenties. More thoughts arise in Albert's head. Thoughts he hadn't had about Florence in years.

Albert felt, for want of a better description, buck horny and what was even more surprising, quite up to it! But being forever the gentle man, he decided to refrain from doing anything too rash. He merely, with a passionately lambardaeques flourish, helped Florence to her feet. Dampening all mischievous thoughts till later.

The journey had miraculously replenished everyone. Even the grandchildren looked revitalised, super healthy, shining, acne free, though still their normal size for age, only a tad more muscular and toned.

Albert breathed deeply as he perused his surroundings. The air was good, earth like. The forest and indeed the entire biosphere felt earth like all except for a couple of notable exceptions. Everything was a bit off colour as though red had been pulled back in the colour spectrum and blues increased. The general intensity of light was also subdued, no where near as strong as earth's illumination, though equally warm in quality. This probably had something to do with the fact that there were three suns high in the sky all bunched together, glowing in bluish hues. There was also, what appeared to be, a well pitted off spherical, greying moon hanging threateningly close on the horizon.

Aside from a mild wind whispering through the trees there was a distinct lack of noise, no birds or animal chatter no flies or insects buzzing and none to be seen. Nothing crawling about or swooping through the sky, enhancing the already, particularly, peculiar atmosphere of the place.

If Albert, Florence and the children hadn't been feeling so good about themselves, strong and relaxed, then they may have been spooked by this lack of life and strange sky line but they weren't as they sat around exchanging points of view on their incredible journey from backyard luncheon to where ever they were now. Which by the way was in a strange forest on an even stranger planet in the middle of who knows where, sitting around chatting, and sharing experiences.

After much discourse- (including the discussion which followed the absolute shock the grandchildren had on seeing their totally revitalised, youthful grandparents) - it came to light that everyone had had very similar experiences in their cosmic travels, with only minor individual variations. All had traversed the universe, mindful and bodiless and had gradually gained consciousness in this new destination, though not all via a diamond ring as Albert had done.

For Florence it was the top of Albert's head which at first looked like a small pinkish nebula then a sort of hairy meteorite before she too had come to, to the apex of Albert's newly replenished hairy cranium. Amanda's consciousness' morph target was an exotic aqua coloured orchid type flower attached to a fleshy, weighty looking, mottled purple vine hanging down from the speckled canopy above.

Mark came to via his own well scuffed right runner, laces first.

## CHAPTER NINE. **A COLOSSAL COSMIC CO-INCIDENT (WHAT, WHY, WHERE AND BY WHOM?)**

If it had been an orchestrated conspiracy, some bazaar, politically motivated, scheme to entrap Albert and entourage it would have required tons of money, an incredible amount of work and co-ordination, supported by a bloody good reason. I mean seriously, what on earth, or anywhere else for that matter, would anyone of right mind want with our fabulous four, no offence intended.

So it is just as well that what had happened to them was merely a series of coincidences, each one independent of the next, one after another totally unrelated until somehow, someday, the Delaware's had managed to become an unfortunate common link.

The chain of events when unravelled went like this:  
Firstly, the arrival then departure of the little off white card slipping silently off the table and then under the sofa out of sight out of mind. Combined with Albert and Florence's poor memories, this led to lift off as such. The graviton gaining consciousness, going for maximum and ending up out of control, sustained the lift off and ferried the unconscious Delaware's to just the right co-ordinates in the earth's atmosphere, the pickup point.

And now for the colossal cosmic coincidence: Almost simultaneously, millions of light years away a, super technologically superior race, heavily into time, space and gravity had been attempting to retrieve a wayward probe which was in a terminal orbit around earth. The probe was, originally, sent just to keep an eye on the neighbours and to checkout a past folly, oh and to assess the current potential of an old asset.

They, the alien race were, back of a bus ugly, resembling halve mechanical tyrannosauruses with boggled eyes and pushed in faces. With teeth, though equally as sharp, nowhere near as ordered or symmetrical as earth's Jurassic version, jutting out in all directions from their sand scoop mouths.

These AI enhanced reptilians possessed an insatiable desire to dominate and or eradicate all other creatures. Whether they were capable or not was another thing, possessing humungous tempers either way. This demeanour stemmed from the fact that they were hygiene freaks and psychotically paranoid of all other life-forms from protozoa up. Hence the absolute lack of life in all forms on the Dino planet and the artificially built and maintained geography and vegetation.

Though very, very intelligent they were still vulnerable to mistake making. Not often, but they did occasionally blow it. This time they seem to have miscalculated their probe's pick up point and plucked instead our dynamic doubles from an inevitable death high in earth's atmosphere.

Good luck for the Delaware's, a pain in the bum for the dino aliens and a gold star on the forehead of coincidence.

The manned (by a really tiny alien dinosaur/machine type thing) pre sterilisation planet probe (or mpp probe) had been careering out of control and was about to burn up to oblivion in the earth's atmosphere, more about the probe later.

Finally, because the original mpp probe pick up co-ordinates were out, the Delaware's were inadvertently transported to the forest, instead of the Cyberdino's main interplanetary space research and development laboratories retrieval unit. Where the alien scientists were currently standing around on their robotic bipedal legs in a quandary; baffled and frankly cheesed off at the disappearance of their satellite and contents. Regardless of, what was an obvious signal showing that at least something had been retrieved, if only misplaced?

*Author's note: (please note that all alien talk and measurement standards etc. have been translated to earth English equivalents for reader ease, alleviating the need for a sizeable translation index at the end of this book, and a lot of toing and fro-ing interpreting the complexities of the cyberdino's communications.)*

After much yelling, rank pulling, teeth grinding, foot stamping and straight up blame levelling, somewhat akin to a mass tantrum. A slightly larger, older, uglier, though regal, and well chromed dino alien appeared.

The room fell into, what could only be referred to as a fear driven silence. He or rather it was obviously the head honcho. Three of the scientists move forward, eyes to the ground, tails shivering. The others quickly found corners to sit and cringe in or the nearest exit for a speedy escape.

The shortest of the three scientists, head deeply bowed, dragging his chin across the floor, approached his master, and then, slowly rising, nervous eyes looking up first, weakly meeting the boss's intimidating gleam.

"Metanort ". The scientist mumbled. The other two standing either side and a step or two back from him, heads also lowered in subservience.

"Yes... Huledew" Came the tempered response. Cool eyes fixed on Huledew, expecting an explanation.

Huledew rattled off a liturgy of celestial facts and figures while the others laid out star charts and reams of what appeared to be a very high form of quantum physics and alternative motion paths.

Huledew babbled on, poking and pointing at various pages, in what was fast becoming a vain attempt at explaining away the disappearance of the probe.

*(Author's note: the probe recently sent to earth to access the development of a colony ship originally sent to earth 165 million years ago. Now here is a little known fact; the colony ship which brought the first of earth's dinosaurs. Kick starting a quantum leap in evolution, an evolution which would ultimately lead to homosapiens. Nice going guys... The colony ship was sent to earth back in those halcyon days of old when cyberdino's looked more like your standard dinosaur, un-mechanized and colonialization was all the rage.)*

*The probe was sent to answer several important questions...*

*Question- how were they getting along?*

*Answer- they weren't*

*Question- had they developed down a similar track?*

*Answer- down the track to oblivion.*

*Question- would they be worth preserving? -(this was arbitrary as it was unlikely the cyberdino's would preserve them even if they had evolved equally having, themselves, developed well beyond any loyalty to their own kind and well beyond any kind of psychiatric help with their hygiene paranoia. Hence the need for a manned pre sterilisation planet probe as earth's assessor. Hygiene first.)*

Huledew continued his technical gibberish explanation. Metanort looked and listened on, his suite of patience thinning. Huledew sensing this went into technical gibberish overdrive which only exasperated the situation.

Metanort, in his now transparent suit of patience, temples pulsing, finally broke.

Pulling in an inordinately large amount of air he bellowed out...

" OK you lot.. That's enough drivelling, get this rubbish out of my face ".

He side swipes everything from the bench top sending a cascade of paper across the floor. The three scientists bow instantly and freeze.

"Get out and get some displaced signal analysts in !... Find that probe! ".

Metanort then turned on the spot and walked out. A decision had been made.

Huledew and crew still vibrating in the wake of Metanort's bad breathy blast stayed bowed for several more minutes after he had left. Just to be certain he wouldn't suddenly re-appear for a final bellow. When absolutely sure that old fartface (*Metanort was only called this behind his back for all the obvious reasons*) would not return, Huledew and team sprang into action.

First things first, a very tense Huledew wandered across the room and screamed abuse at the first subordinate he came across. Laying the blame squarely and finally to bed on him. His spleen suitably vented, he set about bringing in every available displaced signal analysts he could find.

Four analysts were found, briefed and shuffled out to bazaar looking terminals with even more bazaar looking interface devices, set up inside a bland, windowless control room. The analysts were plugged directly into the computers via several permanent, coiling connection appendages. Two protruding from the left side of their heads, four from the right, a couple from the chest and one in a very unfortunate place, that when connected up gave the overall impression that the analysts were standing, peeing in a men's urinal.

The electronic search got under way as trajectories, more maps and co-ordinates flashed across screens. The connected analysts, eyes swiftly scanning, bodies occasionally spasming, sifted through all available data attempting to reconstruct the probes actual return flight path.

Fifteen minutes later they had pin pointed a thirty square kilometre area, five hundred kilometres south of the city. Region f8/12af artificial forest type st9. A scan of the area showed that what ever they had brought back was there; no longer its original size and strangely fragmented into four pieces but definitely there. Huledew gathered all the relevant bits of information together and got back to old fartface with the news, of what was probably, a broken probe and its whereabouts. Were they ever in for a surprise!

Come to think of it Albert, Florence and the children had somewhat of a surprise coming their way as well!

## CHAPTER TEN.                   **READY, SET, GO.**

Huledew's image faded from the screen in front of Metanort's tightening brow. The fact that the probe had returned in four odd sized pieces instead of one solitary probe was sending a wave of paranoia through his ageing flesh and regularly upgraded machinery. Being forever hygiene conscious and as a reassuring precautionary measure, he swivelled around on his hover stool to another control panel and screen. Flicked several switches and announced into the air. His image instantly appeared across the city on public vidiwalls. He needed no introduction. Citizens froze in their tracks, trembling, eyes and ears glued to the gigantic image of

Metanort's head glaring down on them. Fear was a great attention grabber. He simple said...

"Citizens we have an A.S.P. alert, apply all appropriate procedures immediately... Or else".

Metanort's image crackled out replaced by the normal information and advertisement programming.

The citizens hurried on their ways to do what ever they had to do to comply with old fartface's request. Everyone understanding exactly what 'or else' meant.

Metanort felt ill at ease, irregardless of the 'all situations amber alert' being in place. He still needed an appropriate individual to lead the expedition to retrieve the fragmented probe and had a bad feeling about things in general. A feeling he found hard to put a finger on, small and niggling. He continued to pace the room in thought. Mulling over the situation as it stood.

The A.S.A. alert meant that there was a dozen heavily armed guards set at each of the city's, triple air locked exit/entrance ways which were also locked. Sealing the seven kilometre radius, moulded, carbon fibre composite, domed metropolis and it's citizens from the outside. This was certainly reassuring. He needed more... mull, mull, pace, pace...

"Eekslan!". He exclaimed as his thought broke into the room.

Eekslan, a very dynamic Cyberdino and number one agent with the planet protection bureau or P.P.B. (a covert, manipulative, devious, conniving and down right dangerous organisation, all up very similar to earth's CIA, MI5 or KGB). Eekslan, being the P.P.B's top dog, was a master of and therefore epitomised the above description in brackets.

Metanort reached underneath the control panel and pressed a hidden button. This opened a scrambled and discreet line directly to Eekslan wherever on the planet he may be.

"Eekslan... Where ever you are, what ever you're doing drop it and get over to my chambers". Grunted Metanort.

Five seconds later Eekslan's lively response came, flanging through an old pair of speakers set into the ceiling.

"Yo, number one... on my way in...um.. about five".

Eekslan was in the rather awkward situation, of being in the middle of a grease and oil change and full leg repair/upgrade when Metanort called.

He was currently suspended from a mechanic's winch, hanging comfortably in a fluffy, padded harness. One detached leg, lying on the oily shop floor in bits, huddled over by two frantically working mechanics. Now feverishly in fear of their lives at the prospect of not re-assembling and attaching Eekslan's leg in under the five minute deadline.

Eekslan was very cool about it all, having absolutely no fear of the tyrannical Metanort.

"Take your time guys, no need to bust a gut when it comes to old fartface. I want every bolt in place and a foot that faces forward at the end of this, so just relax and do a good job".



No amount of reassuring words could totally alleviate the paranoia injected into the veins of the two mechanics's on hearing Metanort's voice. Least of all kind words coming from the mouth of someone like Eekslan. But because they were currently face by Eekslan and not Metanort they thought it best to fane comfort, attempting pathetic half smiles as they rushed on, in the name of survival...

Four minutes thirty seconds later they had his leg, firmly, expertly and most importantly painlessly reattached. Eekslan was suitably impressed, not hesitating to waft a plastic card through the auto-charge slot, immediately approving payment for the repairs then left. A toothy smile of satisfaction spreading from ear hole to ear hole as he sprang along, enjoying the feeling of his newly revitalised appendage, destined for Metanort's chambers and by the tone of his voice, an important mission.

As the tip of Eekslan's tail slipped through the doorway and out of sight, grimaces of ecstatic relief broke across the faces of the mechanic's. They mopped the sweat cheerily from each others brows then cleaned up Eekslan's old parts, happy to see the last of him and the back of him, at least for the time being. Happy to find themselves alive at the end of another hard day in the treadmill service of the likes of Eekslan and other not so notorious though equally dangerous, planet power brokers.

The swish of a pressure sealed door opening signalled Eekslan's arrival.

Metanort turned on his stool and without greeting said...

"We may or may not have an alien contamination on our hands. I want you to assemble a fully armed and armoured investigative team and look into this problem ". Pointing towards a stack of maps, co-ordinates and support data.

Eekslan scoops them up with his reading arm, nodding in the positive. He starts flicking through the paperwork. Speed reading the brief... When done he looks back to Metanort.

"How soon can you get underway?" Queried Metanort.

"Two or three hours to pick and prep". Answered Eekslan.

"Good...now what about your e.t.a.?"

Eekslan thinks out aloud.

"Five hundred k's divided by average speed fully armoured and allowing for the possibility that at least two of his recruits could truly handle a hoverstick for more than the normal hundred yard hop before throwing up, Mmmm, send out a forward party... I'd guesstimate four days for the forward party and five for the rest ".

(Author's note: the Cyberdinos, as great interstellar explorers have traversed the known universe for millennia, commanding a reputation second to none. This is so because, aside from earth there was no one left to command a reputation from. The cyberdino's having wiped out all other inhabited planets virtually upon first meeting. Conversely they were absolutely hopeless when it came to regular automated terrain travel. Hovering, flying, driving, even a playful piggy back, all forms of over land transportation other than good old walking, made them violently motion sick and if you have ever seen a dinosaur throw up you'd know just how sick, sick can get. Caused simply by a genetic character flaw making them hyper sensitive to the planets gravity and magnetic fields. Consequently, although it was only a five

hundred-kilometre journey to region f8/12af artificial forest type st9, it could, and indeed would take the better part of a week to get there.)

"Fine". Metanort continued... "If it's the probe and it's still kicking, hook him up to life support and a porta-terminal. We need the data he's assimilated. If he is not kicking hook him up anyway, you just never know. That's number one priority. If in turn we do have a contamination problem do what you deem most appropriate, as always ". He smirked.

Eekslan, paperwork in hand, nodded affirmative, short bowed, turned and strutted out. There was work to be done...

Over the course of the next two hours Eekslan handpicked, the most impressive possible search team, totalling eighteen members. All drafted from crack, first assault battalions, anti motion conditioned, the finest findable, the finest affordable. Half were issued with hover sticks and all with antigravity-trip-guns and all-weather/terrain enhanced armour with survival modifications. The troops assembled at the cities southernmost exit, none had any inkling or indeed desire to know what was taking place, being content to simply, blindly but mostly fearfully follow orders.

Eekslan arrived and with the normal hush of fear the troops fell into silent expectation. He welcomes them...

"Hi guys ". Eekslan could give a very good impression of being cordial and polite.

"I suppose your all wondering why I have assembled you here before me today?"

His eyes slowly scanning the troops, his toothy grin spreads then sets.

"Well you can keep wondering, it's none of your business. But what I will tell you is this. We are heading south on what should be a routine trek, a simple retrieval mission... but, always"...

His eyes tighten and lips pull back, revealing his randomly arrayed teeth, sending what he knew would be a tremor of fear through the group. Then unexpectedly he swung his tail around at great speed taking the legs out from underneath one of the already super nervous troopers sending him splaying to the floor.

"...Expect the unexpected... ".

Eekslan lets this practical lesson sink in for about twenty seconds... His attention then settles on one particular Cyberdino, hover stick in hand looking only slightly less intimidated by Eekslan's fear mongering.

Eekslan snapped back to polite, congenial mode. With a lippy smile and innocent eyes he continued...

"Lieutenant Obmar you're to be my second in command... ". Obmar steps forward.

Eekslan hands him a bunch of small gold disks. "Everything you need is on these and.. ". He points to two porta terminals. "...They're your responsibility and so is this lot ", gesturing to the silent seventeen.

"Also pick a two dino forward recon team that's hover stick capable, give them one of the porta terminals then get them underway immediately... Any questions?

No...good, dismissed "

"Sir, yes sir ". Obmar acknowledged, bowed then handed the disks to a nearby subordinate.

Eekslan mounted his comfort customised hoverstick, slipping it into neutral he hung in the air and waited.

Obmar mustered the troops into a couple of rough columns, picked two swarthy looking soldiers he knew to be totally motion conditioned. Gave them one of the porta terminals, briefed them, and then sent them on their way.

Ten minutes later the remaining fifteen lead by Obmar, fired up leg and vest lamps then marched or for those who had them, hovered out through the three consecutive airlocks to the outside world. Followed by a hovering Eekslan leisurely bringing up the rear.

They headed off into an alien dusk which exuded atmosphere. Draped in fog, half lit, blue, warm and moist. Two of the three suns were setting. The third, smaller and much less intense one, sat at two thirty in the sky a little above the western horizon. Painting the landscape in stretched, lean shadows and muted blue half light. Long plums of super heated, oxygen saturated steam rose into the sky from hundreds of vents set into the ground for miles around the domed metropolis.

The massive, underground artificial atmosphere generator system (U.A.A.G. System) kept the planet at an even temperature and moister level both day and night, enabling the cold blooded Cyberdinos to venture out at all times. Only turned on at night the U.A.A.G. System made the air dense and tropical, creating not only the pluming columns of steam but also a half meter thick fog which rolled out, ungelating over the ground for as far as the eye could see.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN. **PLASTIC PARADISE**

We find Albert, Florence, Amanda and Mark comfortably seated, in pretty much, their original landing positions, relaxed after several hours reminiscing and re-adjusting to their new selves. They sit in a moment of quiet contemplation. A gentle breeze buffs the atmosphere...

Albert breaks through the calm of a thirty second silence.

"Ok, let's take stock of things!"

"Anyone have any idea where we might be?"

Blank faces sign a negative response from all. Albert continues.

"Ok, ummm how's it looking on the food front?"

Mark and Amanda's blank faces prevail. A light goes on in Florence's head she forages in her kitchen smock pockets. Feeling something, she stops, beams and looks up... "Oh Albert! I had it here as a special treat for after lunch"

She pulls from her smock pocket a bar of chocolate. A little more scrummaging upturns a stick of stray celery, numerous loose carrots, a potato peeler and a dried up wetex. Florence's forgetfulness had paid off for once. Albert in turn gets inspired.

"Great Flo, it's not an awful lot but for now it's all we've got. Mark, Amanda try emptying out your pockets, who knows what we may have between us all, time to pool our resources."

Albert takes his jacket off and lays it on the ground, placing the chocolate and vegetables upon it. Thirty seconds later, all pockets hanging out, empty and dog eared, the jacket is covered by several useful, and some not so useful items. Namely from Albert a magnifying glass, his glasses, a handkerchief and a half packet of stimorol gum and a pen knife.

Mark's jean jacket was a treasure trove. Three marbles, a modified bic pen blow pipe with a variety of missiles ranging from screwed up paper to silly putty, match sticks and little pins, a Gameboy with 3 games disks, half a chewed sandwich from lunch, a couple of tablespoons or so of rather hairy raisins, fluffy nuts and assorted unidentifiable something's from when ever.

Amanda's donation included a note pad and pen, a mini radio/Diskman with mini headphones, house keys, school ID card and sundry hair pins.

Albert adds the sandwich, raisins, nuts and stimorol to the food pile.

"Until we can find more food we are going to need to ration this lot, so just a couple of pieces for now. As for the rest who knows what might come in handy."

Albert divvies up half the chocolate bar and breaks two carrots into four.

"We'll keep this lot for later." passing it to Florence.

Florence raps the remaining chocolate, veg, sandwich and sundry nibbles into a handkerchief, tying it off at the corners. They then consume their meagre meal in munching silence. Mark and Amanda play off against each other as to who can take the longest in eating or should I say sucking the chocolate.

Albert, first to finish gets to his feet, Mark and Amanda, smirkingly, suck slowly on.

"Ok, now that we all know what we have got between us, re-pocket what's yours... here Florence you're in charge of supplies..." He hands Florence the food package then picks up and neatly coils the gardening hose, slinging it over his shoulder.

"You just never know when we might need this again."

Next he peruses the immediate horizon, licking his finger he holds it to the wind.

Albert expertly continues...

"What do you all say... I think we should ummm head, arrr... north, with any luck we'll come across someone... Keep your eyes peeled for food, fruit in the trees that sort of thing."

Everyone acknowledges agreement with Albert's judgement, as no one had anything better to suggest. Together they wonder off into the nearby blue/greenery in search of better bearings, something more to eat or someone to tell them what's happening.

Mark speeds on ahead and is first to come across potential food, a medium sized, normal looking enough, tree laden with hairy, bright red, rambutan type fruit. He approaches the tree, mouth watering in anticipation. Pop! Plucking the reddest and juiciest looking he tries to peel away the peel. Fingers slipping and fumbling, the fruit flips out of his hands. He tries another, -Pop- "Can't get a decent grip on it" - with the same result. Still determined he quickly plucks two hands full, Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop and returns to the others.

On approach he says...

"Here try and open one of these, they look really yummy and I'm famished." Mark unloads the hairy plastic looking fruit onto the ground at Amanda's feet. They all gather around each grabbing a fruit, eager to open and eat it. But nothing seemed to work. No amount of pulling, tearing, biting or threatening would release the possible snack hidden inside. Albert then tried the potato peeler while Amanda attempted to stab one with her pen but all to no avail, until Amanda notices something...

"Granddad can I have the magnifying glass for a second." she asks.

On closer inspection, Amanda notes that the fruit is actually some form of plastic, a beautiful replica but never the less un-openable, definitely indigestible, plastic.

"This isn't real!" She exclaims to all, holding the fruit up in the air.

One of the three suns starts to idly set, followed by another, slowly cutting the light intensity, sending a dusky wave of blues rippling through the sky.

They continue on into the forest. After several more failed attempts at opening other found exotic fruit and the frustration driven microscopic inspection of other flora, conducted by Mark, Amanda and the magnifying glass. It becomes only too apparent that they are in an artificially built environment. Absolutely everything around them is seamlessly synthetic, it's a plastic paradise.

"What about food Grandma...I'm starving, is anything real here?!"

A still frustrated Mark parks himself on a rock under a tree by a small clearing. The light is failing and a misty ground fog starts to snake out over the undergrowth. Albert makes the decision to set up camp.

Choosing the soft synthetic grass in the clearing as a suitable sight they construct a makeshift dwelling from gathered, elephant ear sized leaves and plastic branches which they found to be cut-able. After fifteen minutes their temporary digs looked quite impressive, sturdy and very roomy. They all clamber inside and form a dinner table circle. A quarter of a carrot each and two hairy raisins later they agree on an early start in the morning then nestle down to sleep.

Some distance north of the sleeping Delaware's and some time later...

Hover sticks cruising on automatic at a medium speed, head lights blazing into the blue blackness of the alien night, the forward recon troops were oblivious to their surroundings. Being totally absorbed playing a very popular Cyberdino game, sort of digital seven card draw stud poker with a difference. Each had their own game screen attached to their hoversticks and although the game is similar to seven card stud poker in form that's where all similarities end.

The real challenge lies in cheating without the other player catching you and of course both players cheat as much as possible using hidden electronic devices which interrupt the data flow in the game system, enabling them to manipulate the cards to their individual advantages.

One boring result of the cheating was that most hands inevitably ended up either a royal straight flush in Hearts against a royal straight flush in clubs or four aces of diamonds against four aces of spades or occasionally both in the same suite. This

was when a quiet acknowledgement of each being a cheat was made along with some subtle body posturing symbolic of varying degrees of embarrassment. Ceremony out of the way another hand would be dealt. What it all boiled down to was that the game over time and due entirely to excessive electronic cheating, had been striped of any subtlety and was no more than an elaborate form of Ace on the Face. Which by the by is another very popular Cyberdino game. The recon troops complete a totally corrupted hand and go through the admission of guilt ceremony. A moment or two of silence follow then one says to the other.

"Hungry?"

"grrYep" comes the gravely response.

Together they hover to ground level, dismount then walk a little way before finding what they knew would be there, a food generator in the guise of a tree stump.

Usually disguised as a rock or tree stump these food generators had been installed all over the planet at great expense. An expense outweighed, in the Cyberdino mind, by the convenience of instant access to food at any time at any place.

Leaning on a tree next to the tree stump as though waiting service at a take away window one trooper calls back to the other...

"Wad da yer want"

"Wad da ya hav'in?"

"Dun no... wad'da yer tink?"

"I'm happy f' ya to choose..."

"GrrrUmmm...I'm not sure"

"Wat do ya like?"

"ummmm...Dunno!" thinking intensely.

This went on for some time as Cyberdino troops, without a commander or their wives near at hand, had absolutely no sense of independent decision making.

"Wad did ya hav last night?"

"Grr-ummm... Vaard..."

"Do ya wan'na hav' Vaard then?"

"I'm easy... whatever.."

"Ok great I love Vaard, so Vaard it is."

The trooper flicks a hidden switch on the side of the tree next to the stump which reveals a monitor and keypad. Leaning forward he keys in their order. Up comes an instant response. 'Out of Vaard'.

"No Vaard... any other suggestions."

"No Vaard.. oh, Grr-ummmm, I'm not sure, Wad'da yer dink?"

"I'm `appy t' av' wot'dever ya av'in"

"Let me hav another look... hey wad'da `bout the `Troopers Can't Make Up Your Mind Menu'?"

"Wad'da ya tink?"

"Dunno."

"Oh... well it's really up to you!"

"Ok then..." a rather pregnant pause...

"What?"

"Dunno"

Pulling out from the indecisive pair, huddled around, and talking to, a tree stump. Several metres away stand the Hover sticks illuminating the misty scene. The landscape, still draped in fog, is a sprawling savannah reaching out in all directions. To the south, in the far distance the grey black silhouette of artificial Forest type ST9 can be made out against the star filled blue/black sky. North, just peaking the horizon is the top of the massive dome of the Cyberdino metropolis. The first hints of dawn touch the east, sending a gleam sparkling across the Domes apex. Colour softly pushes back into the sky as a new alien day dawns.

Mark, high up above their camp, in the branches of an alien tree scans the horizon. From below Albert, hands cupped around his mouth, calls out.

"See anything?"

"A great sunrise" Mark replies.

"Any land marks or signs of life?"

"Well in this direction...(Mark points north) a pretty long way away the forest seems to peter out and become rolling plains. As for the rest it's all forest."

Florence calls out.

"What's the day's weather prediction dear?"

"Looks pretty good Grandma, only a bit of cloud over that way." He points.

"Wonderful Dear" says Florence.

"Ok then, time to hit the road" calls Albert.

"I'll be down in a tick. Uuur uur uurr ur urrrr." Tarzan style Mark monkeys back aimlessly down the tree...

Jumping from the lowest bow onto a rock below his shoe knocks something, triggering a mini monitor and keypad to appear through the top of the rock in-between his feet, which in turn causes him to lose his balance and fall.

"What's this!?" Crunch!!

"Far out!?" choruses Amanda who had been watching.

Unhurt Mark picks himself up from the ground.

"Granddad, Grandma Check this out!"

Albert and Florence busy rolling up the leaves and breaking camp drop what they are doing and scamper over to find out what all the commotion is about. Mark is hunched over the rock about to press a key when Albert seeing what Mark is about to do calls out "Stop! Don't touch it!"

"Oh come on Granddad it's only some sort of computer shopping thing. Here look on the screen there's all these images of plates and containers of stuff and funny writing."

Amanda pipes out. "It might be food!"

"What have we got to lose" adds Florence.

"It might be a trap and rigged to explosives." tempers Albert.

"Oh yeh for sure" and before anyone could stop him. Mark fingers the keypad, responding at the speed of an expert to hi lighted windows, containing stuff. The others turn their backs and cringe as though the thing was about to explode. It didn't but what it did do was to deliver via a side door a tray containing a very interesting

collection of, what one could only assume to be, foodstuffs. Albert, warily, picks up the tray. The opening in the side of the rock slides soundlessly closed then something writes across the monitor screen accompanied by a fairly monotone two bar jingle as it too collapsed seamlessly back into the rock.

"Wow!" said Mark, doing a double take. "Did you see that!?"

"Gone..." states Florence.

"Can you make it do that again" asks Albert

"I'm not to sure. I might have hit something on the tree trunk when I jumped to the rock on my way down." Mark explains.

"You see anything Amanda?" queries Albert.

"Well sort of..." She walks over to the tree and investigates the trunk with her hands. Finding a strangely smooth indentation in the bark she pushes it... And hey presto the monitor and keypad pop out from the top of the rock below.

"Success!" exclaims Amanda.

"Great, food on call" re-enforces Mark.

Albert carries out an arbitrary taste test. Having received no adverse side effects after ten minutes they all tuck into a rather mussy, curiously flavoured and coloured breakfast...

Replenished they set about calling up sufficient supplies for a week from the food dispenser, bundling it all into an elephant leaf ruck sack they set off, once again, into the forest.

## CHAPTER TWELVE **WHO'S STALKING WHOM?**

Two mornings later and well over half way there, enveloped in the accepted mid morning mist, Eekslan, enjoying the out in the field ambience, was in no particular hurry to reach his designated quarry. Convinced that the probe retrieval exercise would be totally routine, he had given orders for a late start. The troopers lolled around in post breakfast relax mode, some play electronic cards others chat, rehearse excuses, checked gear or oil personal parts. Two, having been designated cleaner upperers, were busy tossing plates and leftovers into a previously hidden but now revealed garbage disposal chute, situated several meters from the concealed food dispensing unit. (Ahhh the wonders and convenience of Cyberdino technology.) It was a scene see-able on any planet in any galaxy where troops were deployed in government inspired exercises, requiring them to bivouac.

Quaffing down a final cup of Dino-coffee Eekslan wanders casually over to his hoverstick, fires up the radio, adjusts his personal, fully flexible, microphone. (A permanent accessory attached to a robotic dog collar around his neck) He speaks...

"Band 5 ". It was voice activated. A moment or two of static crackles.

"Big E to Forward Recon.... Big E to Forward Recon....". Impatiently tapping his foot. Eekslan always expected an immediate response from his subordinates, when none was forth coming, he manually cranked up the volume, on hearing only vague breathy snoring sounds and static, he screamed...

"Wake up!!!!... ".



For a standard issue trooper there are very few things in life as terrifying as being woken from the freedom of slumber by the bellowing of your boss crackling through a two watt speaker.

The forward recon team, having travelled non stop for two days and nights, had decided to catch thirty winks before the morning's third sun's rise (It takes two and a half hours for all three suns to rise.). They are presently, lethargically parked, a kilometre inside the northern perimeter of region F8/12AF artificial forest type ST9. We join them there in the middle of a rude awakening. Vibrating from their hoverstick radio speakers...

"WAKE UP!!!!.... "

This did the trick both launched out of slumber and into pre-battle mode, leaping onto their hoversticks with a simultaneous...

"Sir Yes Sir, What can we do for you Sir, Just doing a little foot surveillance Sir. Not asleep Sir ", came their snappy excuse.

All dino troopers knew that, no matter how innocent or guilty for that matter, if ever caught not doing what you were meant to do or being where you were not meant to be, invariably required an immediate excuse. Never the truth and always in synchronised harmony. In fact many, in their spare time, rehearsed appropriate excuses for a variety of possible scenarios. There was even an under the counter book available 'Troopers Excooses for Sticky Moments' and a watered down web site for total novices. In turn superior officers enjoyed the multitude of excuses used by their underlings and kept an eye out for originality and speed of response to give themselves a gauge of their troop's aptitude, timing, cunning and sneakiness.

Eekslan, slightly impressed by the simplicity of the excuse but certainly not convinced, rebukes...

"Troopers Zercon and Blorg, I suggest you focus on speed of response. Better still don't get caught sleeping on the job. You have just earned two demerit points apiece. Now back to business. How far are you from target? Over "

"Sir, thank you Sir ", came the recon troopers chorusing response.

Blorg continued....

"Positioned just inside the northern perimeter of region F8/12AF artificial forest type ST9, Sir, approximately forty K's from target's original co-ordinates, Sir, nothing unusual so far Sir. Over "

"Have you re-scanned the target area recently? Over ". Eekslan queried.

"No Sir... Sir! Should we do this now Sir? Over "

Blorg glances at Zercon, who in anticipation of Eekslan's question pushes several buttons on his hoverstick control panel, animating a small inverted reflector dish to appear. The dish, attached to the top of a telescoping monopod, elongated its way several meters into the air.

"Good thinking trooper but god knows who asked you to. Get on with it, and then get back to me. Got it? Out "

Eekslan's voice faded into the background static.

The reflector dish gyrates in slow 180 degree arcs, emitting a just audible hum. Blorg hovers closer to Zercon and his radar screen. Zercon is twiddling knobs and pressing keys....

"Just having a little trouble tuning this thing in..... Hold on a second..... Urrrr, wait up, ummm...." Twiddle, push, flick, and twiddle.

When ....

"Wooh!! What in the name of Old Fartface is!!!.....".

Zercon cuts off mid sentence as unannounced, the ground around them starts to tremble, and plants shake and shiver. The radar screen shows four very large, fast moving and now almost totally engulfing glowing green dots.

"Whatever it is!? It's vir... vir... ", whimpers a stammering Blorg.

"Virtually right on top of us! ". Picks up Zercon, flicking a switch, instantly retracting the reflector dish.

The trooper's crane and jerk around nervously scanning the immediate vibrating jungle. A huge shadow appears darkening their surroundings. Then something very long and blue with a dirty white flat bit at the bottom appears, powering through the forest, knocking Blorg from his hoverstick. An awe struck Zercon leaps from his and together, as yet undetected, they scurry to relative safety underneath a nearby clump of bushes. Leaving the hoversticks where they lay, slumped over in the undergrowth, vulnerable to detection. Whatever it was, that knocked Blorg from his hoverstick, continued on northwards through the forest.

Spontaneously triggered by implanted adrenaline sensors, jet black, partially reflective, battle armour morphs out from hidden compartments contouring the trooper's bodies, encasing each individual.

Both troopers, now remodelled in an impervious shell, (their outward appearance even more sinister, cold and mechanical than before) cringe together.

Peering out through the synthetic foliage, within their protective coveralls, hearts palpitating from post shock they silently watch on.

Two more of the giant beings make their way past the undiscovered hoversticks. Then a fourth appears, stopping next to, and towering above the hoversticks. The creature, in partial view, appears to be bipedal, all puffy and pinkish. It bends its body almost ninety degrees downwards, extends a fleshy appendage with five meaty bits at the end and touches one of the hoversticks. Then raising it's half hairy, half fleshy head, a small orifice in the fleshy half opens, bellowing out the most terrifying sound.

"Florence! Kids! Get back here! I've found some sort of mechanical boomerang ".

"It's spotted the hover sticks! What'll we do? Z...Z...Zap them? "Whispers a jumpy Blorg to Zercon as he takes aim with an automated eye piece.

"Sit still, shut up and observe "came Zercon's definitive return.

They watch on as the other creatures come crashing back through the bush, bellowing to each other in short bursts of unintelligible gibberish.

"What is it Albert? ".

"Come, have a look ".

"Where are you? "

"Over here, just double back "

The ugly outlanders gather together around the two hoversticks, gesturing, prodding and continuing to bellow.

"Wow... "

"Excellent find Grandad... "

"Don't they look stylish "

"Hey!, check it out. Whatever it is, there are two of them"

"Looks like they're made from the same sort of material as the food dispensing thing "

At least three times taller than even the loftiest of Cyberdino's the alien creatures, (Our fearless foursome the Delaware's) from the trooper's point of view, are terrifying, enormous, alien, and ugly and definitely a humungous hygiene risk.

Arousing a primeval fear lying, until now, pretty much dormant, deep within their relatively large (to earth's pea sized Jurassic version) Cyberdino brains.

The four creatures seem to be in discussion, orifices opening and closing, upper body appendages gesturing here and there. Then the shorter of them starts to fiddle with Blorg's hoverstick control panel.

"Oh no whaa...." To Blorg's bewilderment his hoverstick rises into the air, floating half a meter off the ground in idle.

"Hey Grandad it's a flying machine of some sort! Rad! ". Bellows one of the creatures.

"How many more of them do you think there are? " Whispers Zercon.

" Dunno..... wanna make a run for it?" Asks Blorg.

"No way, there may be more out there, we'd be detected. We've gotta warn the others". Answers Zercon.

"How ? These personal communicators have a maximum range of only just over a K ". Zercon exhales purposefully, eyes fixed on Blorg's.

"You mean....". Blorg engages Zercon's defeated stare.

"Nnot the Eee...Ssss....". Blorg stammers on, Zercon cuts him off.

"I can see no other alternative, we must trigger the E.S.G. "

Zercon and Blorg unable to move without giving themselves away and in fear of the repercussions of opening fire on an unknown quarry, decide the best plan of action is to do the unthinkable and trigger the, never to be triggered unless the whole planet is in imminent risk of mortal danger, Emergency Signal Generator (built into every troopers battle armour) and sit it out. As they were obviously out numbered, out sized, freaked and out of alternatives.

Zercon tentatively raises his left arm towards his face then with his free hand, long nails extended, timidly types the coded password onto a mini keypad illuminated on his wrist. The keypad flickers out, replaced by a large, orange, mutely glowing, button along with a single line of Dino text. Zercon reads it out in a whisper.

"Are you sure?... Penalty For Improper Use ..... DEATH ! Signed Metanort "

Zercon's whole body winches inside its protective peel. Blorg searched Zercon's eyes for reassurance. Zercon did the same back. They looked like a couple of puppy lovers searching for the real thing. Zercon's claws start to really shake then his arms followed by his shoulders, vibrating outwards to his neck then head, guts and legs. Until his whole body was a quiver. Nothing could alleviate this kind of tension. He manoeuvres his claw's first and longest nail into the air, takes a quick glance at Blorg, a slightly longer one out through the foliage towards their immediate adversaries and a last back to the vibrating orange button. Holding this final pose for fifteen more wavering seconds of indecision. Then, arching back his claw's jittering nail, takes a final deep breathe, closes his eyes and presses.....

Zercon opens his eyes. The orange button has been replaced by a red button and three lines of Dino text. Once again Zercon reads it out aloud, in whispers. "Trooper Zercon, this is your last chance. The next button you press is IT!. You have ten seconds before auto-trigger. Press the green button on your right wrist if you wish to terminate activation... Signed Metanort...".

In the mean time, the alien monsters (read Delvwares), having decided on a slightly different route, have grabbed both hoversticks and are fast approaching the huddled together troopers hidey hole. Realising this, Zercon, without hesitation, presses one more time at his blurring left wrist, before grabbing Blorg and scarpering for deeper cover.

The reaction to the Emergency Signal Generator being triggered was immediate and global. The Cyberdino metropolis sealed itself even tighter than before. All manner of weaponry was activated, popping out from parapets built into the dome, silently panning the immediate horizons. Metanort, caught literally legless in his mid-morning Jacuzzi, was being frantically towel dried and reassembled by five extremely nervous Cyberdino ladies in waiting in a room pulsing with warning sirens.

Eekslan's troopers were sent, hive like, into a frenzy of activity. Scurrying this way and that, battle armour morphing, Dino adrenaline pumping. Twenty seconds later all seventeen of them stood in file at the ready, Obmar by Eekslan's side. Before Eekslan could open his mouth to address the assembled troops Metanort's face and blustering voice crackles through and onto Eekslan's speaker and screen.

"Eekslan! What the hell is happening out there? Who's responsible?"

"Can't answer that one Your Masterfulness, the E.S.G. has been triggered by the forward recon team. We're as much in the dark as you are about what's happened, but not to worry, Your Loftiness, we are on the case".

Just off mic Metanort can be heard saying.

"No not that way you fools left socket to left joint ". Metanort turns back into screen, attempting to flick bubbles from his chin and humiliation from his face he continues.

"Good, keep me posted. In the mean time I'm sending out a full battalion, headed up by lieutenant colonel Dipstok .They should reach you within a couple of days forced trekking. Do what ever you deem best, as I know you will. Keep me posted, Out".

Metanort's image is replaced by a gleaming battery of Dino teeth set in a sinister, fixed smile, coloured blood red on a black background, the official Full Alert Symbol.

Taking the initiative Obmar attempts a wide band scan of the area ahead of them. Having trouble getting any decent amount of signal strength from his single radar. " You three! Get over here and get your dishes up, I need a boost. Standard four way configuration, connected to me via array port twelve".

Instantly the designated troopers leap into action. Lining out from Obmar at seven meter intervals, three more reflector dish's make their way skyward, creating a four man array. Obmar, gaining the extra signal boost he required, commences to peruse the landscape southwards. A curious Eekslan floats over.

"What have you got?"

Obmar, absorbed in the hoverstick screen, replies.

"Sir, I have a fix on the recon team, they are stationary, just inside artificial forest type ST9, nothing unusual in that, Sir. Going for a deeper scan depth now and..... Wait up... What's this? "

Obmar, turning to face Eekslan, stabs a steel tipped nail at the screen.

"Arrr, Sir!. Check this out. We seem to be picking up some signal abnormalities. The hoversticks are moving at a decent speed away from the recon team and in our direction, along with four, very large, undefined carbon based objects...".

"Yes, go on ". Eekslan coolly coaxes.

Deftly tapping figures into his wrist keypad Obmar responds.

"Sir, I guesstimate that at their current speed and direction and assuming, hypothetically of course, that we move no further than where we are now .... "

a brief silence for calculation. Coming to a conclusion Obmar looks up. Then hesitates for dramatic effect, concludes.

"They will be here within eight hours ".

"And when you say 'they', just exactly what do you mean ". Quizzes Eekslan.

"Ummm the two hover sticks and ... well Sir, there is insufficient data to definitively identify the four carbon based objects. Might I suggest opening the com line to one of the hoverstick's and risking a peek ". Came Obmar's inspired answer.

"Let's give it a go ". Said Eekslan leaning into Obmar's hoverstick communications screen. Selecting, this time manually, the appropriate frequency, before pushing the call button. The screen flickers on, revealing the ground streaking by at close proximity.

Unaware of their pending predicament and full of excitement over their recent find, Albert, Florence, Amanda and Mark, continue to make their way through the seemingly endless forest, chatting excitedly and searching for a suitable clearing to inspect further these wondrous flying devices, as Florence calls them. Mark keen as mustard, to learn if they did anything other than float. Amanda just wanted to fly one. A forever functional Albert thought they'd be useful to carry their make-shift tent, supplies and anything else they may discover along the way. Florence simply enjoyed the aesthetic values, smooth lines and curves, cool blue metal and intricate chromed detailing.

Spying a large space through the trees they make another slight course change and head for it. Albert has both hover sticks hooked over his arms hanging upside down. Breaking out of the forest and into what they thought was a clearing only to find it to be the edge of the forest and the beginning of miles of rolling savannah.

"What about right here, Grandad! ". Mark suggests.

"Yeah, Grandad, my legs are getting so, so tired ". Re-enforces Amanda, searching for sympathy and a go on a hoverstick.

"Yes, yes ... Hold on a tick," Albert pauses, partly for breathe partly for the scenery.

"My, my what a marvellous vista ". Placing the hoversticks face down in the dirt.

"Let's wait for your Grandmother ". Flipping the garden hose from his shoulder then removing the leaf ruck sack.

Eekslan and Obmar watch on, hoping for a glimpse of their pending adversary as the screen goes to black. Undeterred they continue to listen to the alien gibberish occasionally spluttering through the speakers.

Florence finally appears, Albert wanders over by her side. "Isn't this an unusually picturesque place and what a fantastic panorama ". Albert gestures.

"I agree dear Albert". Florence takes in the surroundings, stepping closer and placing her hand in his.

After a short while Florence feeling the weight of the day says.

"That moon, now that we are out of the forest, bothers me, just a little too close for my liking, and not only the moon. There's something sinister about it all, I can't quite put my fing.... ".

" Aaaaarrrrr..." Cutting her off, "Grand ddddaaad !!!!! from behind them, Mark starts screaming. Albert and Florence turn on the spot; Mark has dropped the hoverstick and is running towards them.

"Arrrr... Let's get out of here! ".

"What is it Mark? ". Questions a concerned Albert.

"Have you hurt yourself dear? ". Asks an affected Florence.

"There's a tur.. ter.. tyrannosaurus thing looking at mmmmeeee!! Through some screen thing in the f,f,floating machine !!!! ".

"Now settle down and show us what you mean ". Albert re assures and together they walk back to the hoverstick still face down in the dirt. Albert flips it over with his foot. The screen is off.

"No snarling tyrannosaurus to be found here". Says Albert.

"But there was Grandad, I'm not lying, I know what I saw and it was a great big head of a really ugly tyrannosaurus, I'm not joking, it had a helmet on and a metal dog collar thingy ".

The others look at him in disbelief.

"I saw it!, I know what I saw and I saw it! ".

"Amanda did you see anything?". Asks Albert.

"Well no, not really, I was just thinking about playing around with the other one and was about to pick it up when he screamed. I didn't see 'my' floating thing do

anything out of the ordinary ". Insists Amanda. A frustrated Mark falters then persists.

" Look, I was in a hurry and they were just sitting there and you and Grandma were doing whatever, so I decided to check one out and when I turned it over there was this armoured dinosaur thing large as life staring out at me... We have gotta find some weapons or somewhere to hide, "Searching for empathy in the others. " I tell you I saw what I saw! ".

A non believing and as always practical Albert. " Arr, well, yes I suppose you have brought up an interesting issue, I mean we really don't know what lies ahead so maybe we should try to make some sort of defence strategy ". Albert ponders a little longer then placing his arm around Mark's shoulders. "Yes, good thinking Mark! OK, before we leave the shelter of the forest and continue our trek, let's try and make some weapons! Any suggestions? ". He answers his own question. "Perhaps we could fashion some spears or maybe a bow and some arrows ".

"Oh just great Grandad, what I just saw, would use them for toothpicks! ". Retorts Mark, regaining some of his pluck.

Albert continues his train of thought, picking up one of the hoversticks.

"And one of these would do nicely as a club ". Swinging it axe-like over his shoulder and into the air.

"How about something to eat first, it must be nye on lunchtime ". Suggests Florence. "Good idea dear ". Agrees Albert, both for hunger and the distraction.

Eekslan's and Obmar's reactions to seeing Mark in the hoverstick screen was pretty similar to Mark's reaction to seeing them. They had momentarily freaked at the sight of such a creature, turned the screen off, together leaping back a meter before regaining their pluck to huddle in an urgent conference over what to do next. The lined up troopers watch on intrigued by their superiors bazaar ballet.

Freaked but not put off, in fact considerably inspired, Eekslan and Obmar chew over the details. Deciding to force march and simply storm the aliens front on, they break from their huddle. Obmar orders all troops to fall in behind him in double file and to remain on full alert. Eekslan takes the lead, heading off at top speed, full of Cyberdino cocky confidence, eager for a fight.

Florence prepares a provisional picnic from their plentiful supplies. They all tuck in. After lunch they spend several hours scouring the fringing forest line, finding enough bits and pieces they set about making a spear each, one bow along with a couple of wonky arrows and a slingshot. All the foraging, cutting and attaching kept Mark from thinking too much more about the tyrannosaurus episode. Indeed after a little while he became more and more unsure about the reality of the whole experience in the first place and was now happily absorbed in slingshot practice.

Amanda, having finally got a chance to try a hoverstick was busy chuckling to herself as she floated, thirty centimetres off the ground slowly spinning in delirious circles around the picnic site, uncontrolled, drunken, and lots of fun.

Albert and Florence, comfortable on a grassy knoll, discuss their possible agenda... "And we have, I guesstimate, say four or five days of supplies ".

"OK "affirms a slightly distracted Florence.

"Although I'm a little reticent to leave the relative safety of the forest, I feel we need to head out across this savannah ".

"Yes I agree dear ".

Albert goes on "Well it's too late in the day to do anymore serious trekking Flo ".

"Yes dear ".

"What say we set up camp here for the night and get an early start first light tomorrow ".

"Fine", says Florence and together they unpack then assemble the leaf tent.

Florence interrupts a minute or two of busy silence.

"Do you think he really saw something? ".

"No, no not at all, it's just his over active imagination, a reaction to this strange place and those unusual floating things, I'm positive there is no more to it all than that ".

Concludes Albert.

"I guess you're right dear ". Says Florence gazing out across the savannah. One sun dropping into the horizon. The moon, cut in half by the arcing tree line, and still way to close for comfort giving the unnerving feeling that it was about to fall back onto the planet.

Florence felt unsettled, the impending night, Mark's earlier episode and just the general alienation, everything had happened so fast. No time to think... No time to remember and relate... She drifts into a day dream full of fragments of misty yet strangely familiar sights, Whale Street, the view from her kitchen window, fish tank, TV, couch inhabited by an Albert. It was a comfortable dream though none of it seemed significant or indeed to make much sense.

It was the past trying to break through. Florence's real self trying to get a look in. This whole cosmic experience had mysteriously dimmed all four Delvware's memories of the past, nothing had replaced them, there was just no sense of needing to refer to them. Everything for them was focused on the now and the immediate future.

"Florence... Florence wake up ". Albert gently nudges Florence's arm.

"Wha.. what ...oh Albert umm". Waking slowly from her daydream. "What are we doing here? ".

"Time for dinner we have an early start tomorrow ". Responds Albert.

"I've just had the strangest daydream about home, warm and familiar, nothing like where we are now. Albert listens whilst slopping Cyberdino food onto four leaf plates. Florence goes on.

" Albert, I sort of know that we have got to get somewhere and find someone, but ....have you given any thought to who that someone might be and how we are going to get back home? ".

Albert stops what he is doing. The children, also struck by the thought, look firstly to Albert then across to Florence, followed by twenty seconds of thinking silence.

Florence was right they hadn't given their old lives back on earth a second thought since arriving on this strange planet, being so caught up with and involved in an intense present and unknown future.

Dinner was eaten with the hush of memory. After which Mark insists on setting an all night watch. Taking turns in two hour watch shifts. Florence supports his idea,



nominating Mark to take the first shift; the others agree then promptly setting leafy sheets they head off to bed.

Albert aware of Mark's vivid imagination fanes sleep with one eye occasionally drifting open keeping a check on things.

Mark sets up vigil, sitting just outside the tent opening, two spears the bow and arrows and a pile of rocks by his side, the slingshot at the ready in his hand.

The first waves of nightly mist swirl in, the second idling sun flickers on the distant horizon before slipping away flattening the forest behind them into a dark silhouette. Mark, half for fun half seriously pans the misty, mutely lit, savannah, eyes peering out through the Y of the his weapon, rubber taut, loaded. He lets one fly into the distance, quickly grabbing another rock, reloads and goes through the same action.

As the mist turns to fog and the light dissolves away to dark, Mark's imagination starts to play tricks on him. The fractal fog bends and twists itself into eerie shapes, before long Mark starts to see giant dinosaurs come looming out, teeth snarling before disintegrating before his eyes as hidden breezes washed them away.

It didn't take long before he became spooked. Taking a few more reckless shots into the darkness, he checks his watch then, loaded slingshot stretched out in front of him, backs back into the tent leaving only the slingshot and his hands protruding out. Mark felt safer now with this narrower point of view, Albert's feet sticking into his back and Florence's soft snoring. Decidedly more relaxed though considerably worse for wear, he attempts to resume his shift.

"Still and hour and a quarter to go "He mumbles to himself...

Maybe just a bit too relaxed... " Wa, wh, What was that!!" He wakes himself from slipping away, and then nodland beckons him forward one more time. Mark nods off to sleep, signalled by the, up until now upright slingshot sliding sideways from his grip, limply shooting its load into the back of Amanda's head. Amanda stirs', brushing at her hair with her hand, but doesn't wake. Albert's occasionally seeing eye witnesses the whole thing. He drags himself up in the confines of the tent and gently moves Mark to a more comfortable place before carefully crawling backwards out of the tent to take up his rotation.

Meanwhile Zercon and Blorg, the forwards recon troopers, have re accessed their situation and have decided that. Aside from staying put and sitting it out, which in many ways was still a very good option, only that they would have been perceived as having done nothing in the defence of the realm at a time of a crisis and more than likely condemned to a grisly death out the back of the science institute sometime in the not too distant future. So sensibly they have decided that the next best thing to do would be to observe these foreign bodies from a discreet distance, which is exactly what they are doing.

Under the cover of darkness and still encased in body armour Blorg and Zercon, looking pretty mean in their own miniature sort of way, make their way through the forest following the trail of the Delvwares.

Slowing their pace as they come to the forest edge. Zercon, first to risk a peek, pops his head out from the foliage into the open, followed closely by Blorg. In the distance one of the aliens (Albert) can be made out just breaching the mouth of the leaf tent readying for watch duty. They both quickly pull their heads back into the bushes.

"This is close enough don't you think "comes an eternally insecure Blorg. Zercon doesn't answer opting to make use of their super efficient night-time stealth he makes his way, skirting the forest line, closer to the alien camp. An anxious Blorg right on his heels, wishing Zercon would talk to him.

Several meters on Zercon breaks his silence. Turning to Blorg he whispers. "Keep an eye out for the other three, though I suspect they're inside that structure and keep an extra one on that one ", pointing through the leaves in Albert's direction. " From here on in we get as close as possible without breaking cover, got it, then get comfortable and sit the night out, OK ". Blorg nods a nervous affirmative. "If they break camp before dawn we back off and follow from a safe distance ". Zercon fixes Blorg with his best stern commander type stare, " If they do anything out of the ordinary during the night we back off, do not attack, retreat, keep all safeties on, got it ". Increasing as best he can his facial expression to support the importance of his commands he fixes Blorg firmly in a final gleam before turning, in an attempt, to pull out...

"Woooh !...". Crunch!! Blorg, in his haste to follow, trips over Zercon's transposing tail, falling out from the forest cover and onto the vapoury bare ground. Zercon, thrown totally off balance, is spinning pirouettes trying to regain his centre of balance. He doesn't succeed and smashes noisily into a tree stump. Not surprisingly the creature, twelve misty meters away, looks up. An exposed Blorg freezes where he lands, prostrate, he slowly turns his head in the aliens direction. He can't see much, the thick ground fog obscuring his vision but he can still hear and what he hears is not good.

Albert peers out into the night in the direction of the noise made by the two clumsy troopers "Mmmm, wonder what that was? ". He mutters to himself. Not truly concerned but inspired into thinking that a limited wander around would help pass away the hours. He casually picks up one of the spears and makes his way away from the tent in the direction of the dark forest, leaving a swirling pathway of mist in his wake.

Before Blorg has time to think Albert looms out of the surrounding murkiness, towering over him. From the frozen Blorg's point of view this was a warrior ready for the kill. Huddling into the dirt he attempts to make himself as small as possible.

Albert's huge left leg swings by, followed by his right which connects convincingly with the mist shrouded, mini, dumbfounded Blorg, sending him football-like several meters through the air, away from the forest, out into the grassy savannah. Albert thought nothing of it, thinking he had simply kicked a piece of artificial wood.

Blorg freaks. Rolling out from his bumpy landing onto his back, he flicks off all safeties, takes rough aim, from the hip without his sightglass and blasts the giant creature with his anti gravity trip gun. Instantly the creatures feet get whipped out from underneath it, suspending it, upside down, a couple of meters in the air and sending it's weapon javelin- like, through the air into the forest, pinning an unfortunate Zercon to a tree by his dog collar. Blorg, in full sight of the hanging creature, makes a run for the forest. Zercon in an attempt to free himself, swivels around awkwardly, sticking his tail out from the forest foliage. Blorg sees the tail and heads in it's direction.

Meanwhile Zercon slams his feet into the base of the tree and pushes outwards. "UuurFF ! ". Freeing himself, lurching backwards he collides with the retreating Blorg. WALLOP!!!

"What the!" "It's you! Get your foot outta my..." "It's not mine it's yours". Get up will you!" "Get off me won't you! "

The entangled two writhe around, feet in faces, for thirty seconds or so before managing to free each other from the others grip. In silence they retreat back into the forest, knowing that the gravity effect lasts for only a few minutes. Time enough, in normal circumstances, for the victim to be disabled and secured but in these circumstances, time enough to disentangle and withdraw safely.

A totally bamboozled Albert, floating upside down, watches on in disbelief. Whether he was witnessing a mating ritual, battle, form of greeting or simply an accident, he was unsure. As the mini armoured dinosaurs make their hasty retreat into the forest. Disoriented, confused, Albert grabs at the air trying to right himself, it doesn't work, he tries to breaststroke back to the ground with little affect. Then remembering an earlier episode and the futility of having no control when floating he decides to call for assistance." Florence... Florence... Wake up.... Flo "

Inside the tent Florence, hearing Albert's muted cries for help, rallies. Sticking her head outside the tent she is confronted by the dark and vaporous night but no Albert.

She calls out

"Albert where are you? "

Through the mist," Flo, over here "comes Albert's reply. Florence makes her way towards Albert's voice.

"What's happened, what's wrong dear? ? "

"I think Mark might have really seen something earlier on "

Florence still unable to see Albert, replies into the night.

"What do you mean Albert? "

Several more paces on, Florence is virtually directly beneath the hanging Albert though she has, as yet, not seen him.

"Well, you see, I think I've just encountered a couple of his Tyrannosaurus's "

Florence, attempting to follow the sound of Albert's voice, arches her head back, nearly falling over backwards as she realises where Albert is.

"Albert! How did you get up there?! "

From on high a remarkably casual Albert responds. "I'm not too sure but I think it was the doing of these creatures I've just seen, they ran off that way into the forest". Gestures Albert.

"Creatures! What creatures?". Questions Florence.

"Tyrannosaurus's". Answers Albert.

What! Like what Mark saw! Tyrannosaurus's!.. What are we going to do". Says a now panicky Florence.

"I don't know, I'm sort of stuck in one place up here but don't worry they are not that big" Replies a ruddy faced Albert, all the blood having rushed to his head.

Then as though by command Albert starts to slowly float back down to earth, head first.

"Thank god, I think that whatever it is, it's wearing off". Says Florence, reaching up, attempting to cradle Albert's head as he comes drifting down.

"I think you're right Flo".

Albert's feet touch terra firma. Flushed but otherwise feeling none the worse for wear for his experience, he explains to Florence about his encounter with the mini mechanical tyrannosauruses.

"I had just taken over watch from Mark when I heard something so I went to investigate, then somewhere around here I kicked a rock or something and a moment later, bam! my legs get taken out from underneath me and I found myself, up-side down, up there looking down on two of these mini armoured dinosaurs, one is running underneath me the other comes barging backwards out of the forest, where they collide or meet, mate or fight, I'm not sure, anyway they continued growling and rolling around in the mist, right there just next to the forest line, for half a minute then unravelling themselves they scarpered back into the forest and well, that was it".

Florence stood, mystified by Albert's story, "So they aren't giant killer tyrannosaurus's?".

"No my dearest quite the opposite". Taking the lead, Albert hooks his arm around Florence's and together they wander back towards camp, still deep in conversation over what to do about their situation and the Tyrannosaurus's. Whether they posed any genuine threat, whether to wake the kids and tell them, whether to move out now or wait until dawn and better visibility. By the time they had reached the tent they had come to a decision. Trying their hardest not to wake the kids, Albert and Florence hastily break camp.

"Now Flo if you could just help me get this... over my shoulder..."

"There we are". Florence assists Albert into the leaf rucksack.

"Great, ta, OK now the children". Albert grabs one of the hoversticks and fires it up.

"If you could lift him from that side, yep that's it and over". Florence and Albert place the sleeping Mark on top of the hovering hoverstick. Firing up the second hoverstick they do the same with Amanda, who mutters something in her sleep, gesturing with her hand, hitting an as yet unknown button on the hoverstick's control panel, sending a well defined spot of light, cutting through the mist. Taken totally by surprise Albert rushes to dampen the sudden illumination with his jacket.

"This is handy, if we can keep it under control. Did you happen to see which button you pressed?". Whispers Albert.

"I think it was this one". Florence flicks a button on the hoverstick, nothing happens.

"No, not that one", she says to herself before she tries another. The headlight cuts out.

"That's the one". Says Albert unravelling the garden hose. "Flick it back on will you dear". She does. Now illuminated in the mist Albert tethers the hoversticks together using the garden hose.

Once done he takes up the slack in the hose, aiming the two hoversticks and their slumbering loads away from the black forest, towards the murky open plains northward.

"Let's do it" says Albert in the spirit of adventure. Florence smiles, swings the bow and arrow sheath over her shoulder, then tucks the remaining spears under one arm, the slingshot along with a good supply of rocks bulging in the pocket of her kitchen smock. "Ready when you are mon captain".

"Forward Ho!" Albert waves his hand through the air as though commanding a cavalry battalion.

Towing one headlight, two hovering sleeping children and prepared for just about anything Albert heads out into the soupy savannah with Florence, armed to the gills, bringing up the rear. They diminish into darkness curtained by the night, tailed a minute or so later by the demoralised yet undeterred forward dino recon team.

Blorg and Zercon scurry this way and that making overkill use of what little ground cover there was, considering how dark and foggy it is. Keeping as discreet a distance as possible from their quarry, now just a pin of light out there in the gloom.

Eekslan and troopers stop. Rescanning ahead, finding that the four aliens are once again on the move, followed by, what they knew to be, Blorg and Zercon. After a short chat with Obmar. They re-guesstimate contact time.

"At this pace, no deviations, six hours... If we send one of these out now," Obmar reveals a tiny probe-like thing, a gyroscope surrounding a silvery ball with a lens set into it, and tosses it into the air, the probe speeds off into the distance.

"In three hours we should be able to get visual contact".

"OK good Mmmm, Dipstok and reinforcements are at least a day and a half away". Eekslan mulls over the stats. A plan of attack forms.

"Let's keep going, get this lot into battle formation. I'll make definitive decision when we have further visual data from the probe".

Obmar orders the troopers to fan out and lag, six either side of Eekslan and himself.

The troopers respond creating an arrow head tipped by Big E and Obmar. Obmar sends the remaining two out ahead by one hundred and fifty meters to act as signal men. Then he and Eekslan drop back, the troopers shuffle in to take up their space. Eekslan and Obmar becoming the, well protected, shaft of the shielding arrowhead of troopers. The formation moves out once again into the night. A late rising moon

pushes itself, like an about to erupt pimple, up and over the horizon bouncing a quantifiable amount of new light across the plains.

As the night wears on the Delaware's slow their tempo a little. Albert kills the light from the hoverstick finding the moon light more than sufficient to see by as they cruise across the barren landscape. The kids occasionally turning or talking in their sleep but not waking. Aside from the moons mounting invasion on the sky line their journey continued uneventfully. For the time being no more manic little dinosaurs running around causing havoc they pace on in Zen silence.

The Cyberdino terrain probe tears across the savannah at a good thirty k's per hour, three meters off the ground. It's little lens rotating this way and that. Eekslan has the probes visuals on his hoverstick screen for ambience rather than information. He eventually drifts off to sleep, hoverstick on autopilot. Obmar nods in and out of slumber occasionally lifting his head to adjust manually the probes course or to bark 'Wake up' into the general com line, making sure the troopers weren't enjoying the same luxury as their command.

Time passes.

Out of the blue, interrupting Albert and Florence's transcendental travelling mode, the probe makes its appearance through the half light and fog. Albert sees it first, "Flo what's that", pointing in the direction of the fast approaching probe.

Florence looks up in the direction indicated, "I've got no idea but...." She goes into unexpected action, striding backwards to accommodate the accelerating probe, she pulls the slingshot from her smock expertly loading it before taking precision aim. BANG! Slams her well-trained rock into the side of the speeding probe sending it hurtling ground wards to bounce several times before spinning into inaction on the ground behind them. Some inner light pulses... weakening, now inoperable.

"I don't think it can do us too much harm now". A warrior-like Florence strides, with newfound confidence, over to her first ever victim. The well dented probe lying in a couple of centimetres of dust, glows off then on several more times before finally giving up the ghost, indicated by a short mechanical exhale and the light dimming to oblivion. Albert leaves the hoversticks and, still sleeping, kids were they are and wanders over by her side.

"Well done dear! What fortitude! What precision, what a good shot! ... Florence I've never in my entirety witnessed this side of your character, such focus of determination!" Albert was, almost, beside himself as he embraced the warrior Florence.

In-between winks Obmar catches the start in glimpses of the probes dilemma, smartly flicking a switch, capturing Florence's energetic attack before the probe

terminated its transmission. Obmar then hovers over to the sleeping Eekslan nudging him to wake.

"What's up ?".

"This !". Obmar plays back the final moments of the probes existence.

"They are pretty big and sort of mushy, don't you think? ". Says a confident Obmar. Eekslan, frankly surprised by their appearance and in Florence's case her form and agility, momentarily drifts off, turning his head towards the stars above.

"Never seen that sort of weapon before ". Points out Obmar. Eekslan returns from his moment, focusing once again on the screen.

" Mmmm looks simple, very affective, ". Eekslan plays with the shuttle perusing the images of the probes demise. Definitely taken aback by what he sees, he turns to Obmar with his appraisal of the situation.

"Well it looks as though they are quite capable of putting up a decent fight, fact number one ".

Obmar, eager for the chance to test his troopers in real battle, attempts to counter Eekslan.

" Yeah but Big E if we can surprise them before they can arm, I mean there's only four of them and well eighteen of us, overwhelming odds in our favour, don't you think."

An un-listening Eekslan continues.

"Fact number two, we know very little about what other weaponry they may possess or indeed whether there are anymore of them lurking beyond our surveillance system ".

"The bigger they are the harder they fall ". Metanort waxes lyrical.

A green light starts flashing on Eekslan's hoverstick. Eekslan switches the screen to receive the com signal. Metanort's tired face appears on screen.

"Big E what's the juice? ".

"Can't sleep? Oh Eternally Vibrant One,"

"Right in one, now cut to the chase, what's happening out there? ". Blurts a bleary eyed Metanort.

" Well you've called at an appropriate moment Your Enigmatical Eminence, we have only just this moment made contact using a terrain probe, take a gander at this, Oh Great Sty In My Eye ".

Eekslan plays back the probes demise for Metanort. The screen, split in half, Metanort on the left and the looping video on the right.

"That really pisses me off "says Metanort.

"I thought it might ". Returns Eekslan.

"Ugly looking blighters aren't they "says Metanort.

"You said it Your Worthiness ". Replies Eekslan.

"What's your plan of action? " queries Metanort.

" Well Prime Mover, initially I thought to hit them head on but after seeing this ones tenacity I'm now tending to teeter towards thinking we should wait and team up with Dipstok, no reason to take unnecessary risks if we don't need to, Tumultuous One ".

"Solid thinking Eekslan!... Wait a second let me think..... Now, what about I give them a bit of manipulated weather, a force 9 tropical cyclone, just to tire them out a little before you guys strike. ".

"Great thinking! You can sleep soundly Oh Sire Of Our Service, I'll call in again once we have met up with Dipstok and Co, if you need, in the interim, anymore reassurances, don't hesitate to give me a buzz, OK, Your Royal Ingenuosness ". Metanort's face fades from the screen.

Eekslan turns to Obmar.

"Time to back track a little, call the troopers in and get them briefed... Also get Dipstok on the blower and set up an appropriate rendezvous point. We are not going to take these beasts on alone ".

"But Boss, I've been my entire life in the military and never seen action, never once..."

Eekslan cuts him off.

"Listen knucklehead we don't know what we don't know so, best to take things cautiously at first. We will all get a taste of action in due time, that I'm sure of ".

Obmar smirks in anticipation, turns then barks into his mic "This is a general command, Halt! Things are afoot, get your miserable selves back here on the double, full briefing in five minutes! ".

Five minutes and thirty seconds later, new orders having been given, the troopers turnabout face, shuffling into a loose column formation behind Obmar and Eekslan. Obmar hoots out over his shoulder "Forward Ho! ", waving his little Cyberdino forearm gesturing forward.

A couple of the columned troopers mutter. "Oh the futility of it all. Why did we bother in the first place" "They are hopeless them up top!

"Yeah first one way then, how's your father it's flip it all arse over tit and your hoofing it back the way you came.

"Be bugged if I'm gunna keep this up forever..."

"Pull the other one ". comes one response.

"Yeah, like you're really gunna do anything about it....." comes another.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

## **SURF'S UP**

The voices and the snaking column of dino troopers dissolve into the night as claps of thunder and flashes of lightning start up on the far distant, southern horizon.

Albert, Florence and kids continuing on as before, when from out of nowhere, what usable light from the moon was crushed into an ominous black as mountainous clouds spontaneously built above them accompanied by a tormented wind whipping sand and dust into the air, stinging faces and waking the kids.

" Wooh, where has this come from? " Shielding his eyes, Albert fumbles around trying to locate the hoverstick lights.

"What's happening Grandma?... Grandad !? "Calls a disoriented Mark, his searching face, flash illuminated by a vicious shard of lightning followed by a devastatingly loud clap of thunder and a torrential downpour.

"Woow!!" Mark cringes, holding tight to his twirling hoverstick.



Bullet sized pellets of water smash into the dry sands around them.

“Woooooh!!!” Amanda grips tightly to her hoverstick.

“Hold tight you guys, we will have to ride it out.” Albert calls through the teaming frenzied rain. “Brrrrrr...” Florence pulls her cardigan up over her head. As intertwining rivulets metaform the exploding sands around them.

Not all that far away and caught in the same downpour, the obviously disposable, Blorg and Zercon look at each other through swishing mini wipers on their visors, with a sense of defeatist inevitability, realising that the storm was Cyberdino doings.

Each extracted from their utility belts a small metal cylinder which they then plugged into a female socket on the side of their neck armour inflating plastic pouches, from some hidden compartment, which ballooned out and around their necks. Cyberdino floaties.

Huddling together “We have got to find cover....” Albert screams into the wind.” No use getting washed away “He looks down at their feet; the rivulets disappear becoming streaming, flowing water, several centimetres deep. “Come on... Hold tight and stick close”.

In rigid formation they move slowly forward, buffed by the wind, occasionally communally slipping sideways. The lights from the hoversticks cutting a meter or two into the soup before bouncing flooded, back. Better than no light at all. They are making slow but constant progress when an abrupt super strong gust of wind makes a serious attempt to thrash the feet out from underneath Florence and Albert who defy the tackle, angling deeper into the onslaught though Albert’s grasp has been weakened.

“Just... Got to... Get a.... bet..ter grip on this thing. “Albert twists around to get a better hold on the hosed together hoversticks. Another lightening flash shows Mark and Amanda, determined, hands clasping fast, bodies fluttering like flags in the wind.

Albert in the middle of relieving one hand with the other when a second sudden gust hits, accompanied by a humungous thunder clap. Whooosh!! BANGGG!!!.

Florence stumbles, tries to retain balance, and slips again, slides, finally falling, accidentally jerking the hose from Albert’s hands.

“Oh no!!” Albert cries as he loses his grip.

“Uuuf.. Ouch.. Splash.. Bubble “. Caught in the cyclonic gust Florence, the hoverstick’s and their loads, tumbleweed several meters before...

“Urrfff.. “ Albert makes a spectacular leap through the air... “Gotch ya ! “ grabbing Mark’s, passing, foot. “Don’t worry son I’ve got you, just hold on!. “ Albert digs his feet into the mud under the swirling torrent now twenty or so centimetres deep and rising fast. Mark in turn has a grip on one of the hoversticks which is still attached to the other. Amanda, white knuckles, holding fast to the flaying hose nozzle, splashes around trying to find her feet.

Florence having landed in a water filled trench floated, twirling by, out of the light, and out of sight.

"Florence! Florence! You OK!!! "Albert calls desperately into the night after her.

As Florence disappeared to the left off into the gloom, from the right, out from the gloom, floating along in the same trench came Blorg and Zercon. They had never even bothered to fight the flow; well it's a little hard when you're only just over half a meter high. Floaties holding their heads high, clear from the torrent and resigned to their fates they simple closed their eyes on seeing Albert and the kids come looming out through the murkiness, hoping their damndest not to be seen before disappearing back into the shelter of the dark. As luck would have it, they did go unnoticed, Blorg and Zercon floated by Albert and the kids right on the tail of Florence.

"Grandma you OK.. Grandma..." Mark and Amanda join in.

"Flo..." Albert tries manoeuvring the light in her last known direction.

Then out of the darkness comes Florence's reassuring voice...

"Yeah I'm over here, I'm OK, not to worry! Just keep talking, can't see a thing, got to follow the sound of your voice". Florence yells back, fumbling in the darkness. She waves her arms around searching for a hand hold, she feels something, and grabs it in her left hand, then swinging her right arm through the water trying to counter the current something brushes her hand, so she grabs that as well, using the objects at first like paddles and then like crutches she regains her footing and drags herself out from the torrent-full trench. Then like a tightrope walker, arms extended for balance, she makes her way back towards the calling voices. Left arm outstretched, hand still holding, by the scruff of his armoured neck, a frozen muddied Blorg. Her right hand grips a dismayed Zercon who if anyone could only see in this pitch blackness had a look as though to say 'Things just couldn't get any worse, when they did `.

Florence ploddingly makes her way back slipping and sliding occasionally slamming Blorg or Zercon into the muddy water as counterbalance.

"Over this way Dear, you can't miss us, we haven't moved since..." Albert calls into the bedevilled darkness. "Yeh we're here... Over here" Chorus's Mark and Amanda. Twenty tense seconds later she reappears out from the harassed mist, like the creature from the black lagoon emerging from its primeval soup.

"Ahh there you all are "Smiles Florence as she makes her way back into the light cast by the hoversticks. A Cyberdino in each outstretched hand, a waterfall pouring from her pregnant smock pocket.

Albert and the children look dumbfounded at her.

Albert attempts "Um... Flo, dear, what have you brought back with you...?"

An unaware Florence looks to her unwitting outstretched hands, "AARRHHHHH!!!"

She shrieks, throwing Blorg and Zercon back flipping into the murky rapiding waters.

"Quick grab them! " Albert makes another dive through the air, belly flopping into the water; he manages to grab Blorg by the tail, a quick moving Mark snatches up Zercon holding his prize in the air by the scruff of his neck.

"Well, well, well, look what we have here." Albert manoeuvres Blorg closer to the hoverstick's light. Blorg stays frozen only his mini wipers move swishing mechanically back and forth. Mark joins him with his catch, the totally defeated Zercon, hanging limply in his grasp. Swish, swish, swish, swish.

Once again they all huddle around the hoversticks. The rain teaming on, the blackness beyond the lights permanent.

"So this is what I saw in the monitor" says Mark proudly prodding his captive's dorsal floaty.

"Careful what you're doing there lad, these things might stand knee high to a grasshopper but they have some mean weaponry at their disposal, what ever you do don't let them too close to these hoversticks." Albert warns, wiping the last of the rain from his face. The swish, swish, swishing of the mini wipers fill a pregnant pause.

"What on earth are we going to do with them? queries Amanda. "Can't I touch it "she pleads, bending, with finger extended towards Zercon.

"I wouldn't advise it sweetheart "cautions Albert. "Here, first help me get their utility belts off, don't want another trip with gravity "Albert fiddles with Blorg's utility belt, Amanda's pointing finger assists. They manage to detach the belt successfully then move over to Mark's captive, and remove Zercon's belt. "OK, pocket these....

Now, how to secure them?" ponders Albert stuffing the belts, weapons and bits jingling, one into each of his coat outside pockets.

"Well they are so small I could just pop them in my smock pocket "Says Florence jokingly, emptying the last of the water from it then fluttering the pouch open invitingly.

Albert catches a thought. "That's not such a silly idea Flo... Here get your smock off and lets see if we can't bind them up in it, sort of like a straight jacket kind of affair."

Florence firstly ties the Cyberdino's legs together with the ties from her smock then Albert places his Cyberdino swiftly into the smock pocket, Florence holds it tight from behind. Mark manoeuvres his dino into place. "Release on my count.. One... Two... Three!!! "Albert grabs the outer edges of Florence's floral kitchen smock, and then expeditiously raps the two tiny contemporary reptilians into a neat parcel, with just their heads and the swishing wipers in view.

"There! Done... Nice, safe, and secure. "States a confident Albert as he ties, the terrified two, off on the garden hose, with his handkerchief, at a point farthest from the hoversticks, " Let's look for dry ground before we inspect these critters further. "

All the while the water around them continued to rise. The pushing current though, was weakening. They now stood belly deep in a rippling expanse of water, well at least belly deep for Albert and Florence, the children floated along using the hoversticks as support, the bound Cyberdinos bringing up the rear, helpless on their backs they had the good sense to turn off the irritating wipers as the tormented sky of just a minute ago dissipated revealing a clear starry, moon lit night. The moon

casting its gleaming reflection spectacularly, outwardly across the never ending lake surrounding them all.

This time, under Albert's guidance, everyone ties onto the, eternally useful, garden hose. Chest high in water and drenched to the bone Albert pans the horizon trying to get his bearings, mumbling to himself he looks to the heavens. "So the moon was over there.. mmm.... and umm.. yes that star... right I remember... so... mm mmm... Ok !" Albert then announces to the group " I'm pretty sure we were going in this direction. " Pointing north-westward, out across the now level lake, which had reached its peak.

"Swim Dear? " Albert rhetorically invites Florence. Together they push away breast stroke style trailing the kids and the captives.

They swim along for several minutes in silence...

"Hey ! Look over that way! Granddad, I can see something." Mark calls excitedly. Albert and the others peer out in the indicated direction. And sure enough there on the far horizon sat a long dark solid silhouette. Adjusting their course slightly they head in its direction. "Might be an island "says Mark. "Or better still dry land." follows Amanda.

The closer they get to the silhouette the more detail comes into view. "Looks like a beaver dam from here. "Says Albert. I few strokes closer. "Wow! Look at all that mess. "Exclaims Amanda. "Must have been put there by all this inclement weather. " Says Florence.

The wall of debris had indeed been built up by the storm, but unbeknownst to our travelling troubadours this wall of muck was holding back the nouvelle lake which they had just spent twenty minutes swimming across. Also unbeknownst to them was that if they had bothered to swim forty or so meters further to the left, they would have come to an easy accessible normal shore line, so unaware of the better option...They decide to attempt to go over the debris dam instead of around it.

"Mark, untie yourself and come over here, lets see if we can't get you up there on top, find out what lies on the other side, hopefully dry land. " Albert reaches over assisting Mark through the water.

"No problemo Granddad." comes Mark's enthusiastic response.

"Looks a little treacherous Dear, you two do take care." Says Florence, looking up at the random array of dislocated branches, matted sodden leaves, loose rocks and stuff making up the dam.

One large sized, knobbly, wooden looking beam embedded in the rubble pile protrudes, diving board like, out over the water. Albert positions himself underneath it.

"Right-ee-o Mark, urff, up you go. " Albert lifts Mark up above the water line. Mark reaches out and using the beam for leverage hauls himself half way up the embankment. The loosely packed debris shifts and rattles under his feet, making it

incredibly hard for Mark to get a decent foot hold "Hey Grandad! I'm not really getting anywWHhhEeerrrr...." Mark totally loses his balance falling outward, he manages to grab onto the end edge of the beam, but rather than taking his weight the beam pivots ponderously, left then right. "Wooh... Wooh!" "Hold tight!" Before jerking downwards into the water missing Albert by millimetres, forcing the other end of the beam out from its keystone position in the pile of debris, effectively breaking the back of, what they now realise to be, a very temporary dam.

Ergo like pulling the plug out from the sinkhole, the up until now restrained lake burst forth. Albert, Florence the kids and Cyberdinos getting boisterously sucked through the breach, followed by thousands of litres of turbulent water. Confusion reigns as all hell breaks loose.

Churning this way and that, dunking and writhing around in a new foaming nightmare, Albert, with super human determination, pulls hard at the hose, successfully reeling in the floundering followers. He then wangles the hoversticks and rucksack tightly together, creating a kick board for everyone to hold onto, grappling the kids into position. Florence finds her own place. Now four abreast facing forward, foam frothing, the luckless Cyberdinos left to splosh, ducking and diving around, wipers back on again, in their wake.

The hosed together bracelet of beings, ride the crest of a wave of the one and a half meter high wall of a flash flood. An unintentional flood, caused by the purposeful storm sent to slow them down, Metanort's antonym. A quantum flood now careening, at thirty kilometres per hour, along a path laid down a millennium ago by some ancient river, a hidden feature even the Cyberdino terraforming hadn't eradicated. A path out of anyone's control, leading in due course, (and this will really cheese Metanort off) towards Eekslan and Dipstok's verging on merging troopers.

Hovering, others plodding, along in the darkness, totally unaware of their impending dip, the cruising, snoozing Eekslan and crew have made considerable ground since turning about face. Troopers on hoversticks drift along in comfortable sleep, autopilot keeping them on route. Those on foot, having tied off to the nearest hoverstick, slumbered along lethargically, courses occasionally corrected by a jerk from their snoring auto piloted guides. Although all were essentially asleep the ruckus from their sniffing, snoring, burping, farting, sleep talking and sundry other unmentionable digressions, could have woken the dead.

On any other planet, (that's if you can believe the Cyberdino's claim to having eradicated all carbon based life-forms in the known and indeed unknown depths of the universe, other than earth.) As I was saying... On any other planet those first glowing shafts of light thrown in what ever spectrum by the rising sun, would have been heralded by a chorusing burst of bird song and the hungry muted flutters of early rising creatures. But not here, the first sun simply, slowly, quietly, colorwise impressively, pushed its way over the horizon. Blue light marking a new day.

Obmar the first to wake of the snaking column of troopers, leans over to the sleeping Eekslan's hoverstick control panel, pulls back a small lever, de-accelerating the craft to

a hovering idle, he attaches a leash to it, leading Eekslan and sequentially the others towards a large rock and the known to be there, food dispensing unit. Dismounting, he tethers the leash to his own parked hoverstick, finds the food unit activation button, orders coffee for eighteen. A tray of ten pushes out from the side of the rock. Obmar grabs one then wanders over to Eekslan still peacefully snoring away. Nudging him awake.

"Your coffee Sir."

"Mmmm waa , oh.. Right... great, thank you Lieutenant." Eekslan returns to the drab reality of stirring into a new morn.

Then wandering back to his own hoverstick, Obmar, (about to do something he really enjoyed doing) opens the general com line, breathing in deeply he screams... "Wake up !!! You Miserable SSslobs!!"

The response was instantaneous, all dino troopers snapped out from their personal cosy places back to their predictable existence's, many so affected spontaneously morphed into battle gear, their adrenaline glands being thoroughly stimulated. One or two wet themselves.

Then cynically apologetically Obmar follows through with a sociable "Coffee's up! " Ensued by innocuous Cyberdino muzak, the type you get in Cyberdino shopping malls, mono rhythmic, monophonic, a monotonous moniphony.

Obmar was really enjoying himself.

The slothful, duped troops groggily congregate around the rock, sucking dino coffee, not a lot to say, squinting eyes adjusting to the morning light, stretching, and vying for the suns warm rays. Not until the second round of coffee has been consumed do they start to resemble what they were meant to. A crack force to be reckoned with, as opposed to what they really were, eighteen cold, undersized and over mechanised reptiles about to be skittled by an awful lot of water sent inadvertently by their boss. It's was only a matter of time.

Meanwhile back at the Cyberdino metropolis in the weather control and monitoring centre a technician sitting in front of a computer monitor turns to another technician sitting across the equipment filled room.

"Hey take a look at this!"

"What is it? "

"Get over here, have a look for yourself. "

The other technician pushes himself off with a jerk, rolling his wheeled chair over to the monitor. "Mmm... interesting. "

"Looks like that mess of water built up after the storm has gone and got a life of its own."

A digital representation on the monitor, in front of their unhinging faces, shows an ever decreasing lake emptying, a snaking tail pouring forth in a north westerly direction following the ancient river bed. The two technicians turn and face each

other, both facially gesturing that it was the others responsibility to spread the news and spreading the news, being directly accountable to Metanort meant of course giving him a buzz and suffering the consequences of being the bearers of bad news..

They break their psychic silence.

"No you tell him, why do I have to take the fall."

"Well you are two degrees my senior and..."

"OK, there you go ... I order you to call him. "

This went on for some time both in fear of the consequences, neither wanting to break the news to Old Fart Face.

"OK, OK, OK," The slightly more superior of the two exclaims. "Why don't we do it together. "

Being the best suggestion so far, together they move over to the communication desk. One of them flicks a few buttons. Metanort's impatient face appears on screen. Having only just got off to sleep for the first time in a long night he wasn't in the mood for much.

"What is it?? " He barks, sallow face filling the screen.

"Arrr well Sir..." Starts off one technician.

"We have..." Continues the other.

"Something here which.. ummm.." picks up the first . Then faltering.

"We think you should.." Each helps the other to compose the bad news story.

"See ... "

The eternally short fused Metanort, and who is to blame him, has had enough.

"What do you mean? And stop with this two man tale telling, you on the left, just you and you alone continue." Metanort picks the slightly less junior of the two technicians.

"Sir, I think that you should take a look at didgi feed 7 the weather control output. "

"Why?" comes Metanort's flat reply.

"Well it's the storm Sir it has caused a bit of a flood. Sir. "

"What do you mean, man. "

"Sir without meaning to sound impolite Sir but you really should take a look. "

Metanort swivels around on his hover chair to one of the many screens in his command centre. Switching it on, he channel smashes through to didgi feed 7. And there it was, clear as day, a digital animation of the flood making it's way forth. In silence Metanort deftly pushes several other buttons bringing up an overlay, of the routes taken by both Eekslan and Dipstok and their troopers. He pushes a few more buttons, scaling the two images to matching ratios.

"Shute!!! " The obvious was, well, obvious, staring Metanort right in the face. Eekslan's breakfasting troopers were directly in the course of the speeding water wall.

"Go on! Get out of here; I'll deal with you two later. "Switching off the image of the two, now totally terrified technicians, Metanort immediately calls up Eekslan whose face appears after a moment of screen static. With no introduction Metanort gets straight to the point.

"Right, now listen up, you haven't got long. There is a wall of water heading your way and fast, I guesstimate it will be at your current location..." Metanort casts his eyes over the overlaid images of the flood and Eekslan's position, he continues..." In I'd say about eight minutes."

"What!!" Replies Eekslan.

"A Flood man! Oh look, it's a long story but basically the storm I sent to stop those creatures has created a flood. Just get yourselves to higher ground, get prepped dig in and hold tight, there's not a lot I can do for you from my end. "Comes an almost apologetic Metanort.

Eekslan exhales contempt and disbelief.

Albert, Florence and the kids gurgled along, wind in their faces, quite enjoying the ride now that they have found their sea legs as such. They ride the wave like champions. Being able to control their direction they communally manoeuvre: gliding effortlessly from the left then to the right, ontop of the waves rippling dirty white crest. Pulling back then tilting inward, picking up speed, moving forward to the head of the wave then trimming back comfortably to its middle. Blorg and Zercon had managed to flip themselves onto their backs and aside from the constant spray kicked up by the surfing Delaware's, were surprised and in fact wholly happy at the fact that they were still alive at the dawning of a new day. Swish swish, swish swish.

"This isn't so bad; at least we are making good ground." Calls Albert to Florence.

"I just love these alien dawns "responds Florence, nodding as she gazes out to the blooming horizon. The second sun just clipping in. Muted blues pushed brighter, deeper, introducing indigo and purples to the wispy skyline.

And indeed they were making good ground. Before being forced to catch the wave, they had been around about fifty kilometres from the retreating Eekslan and team, now, just over an hour and a quarter later there is only ten or so kilometres separating them, ten kilometres and closing fast!

*Meanwhile (And yes I realise that the word 'meanwhile' is an incredibly over used cliché but as one goes further into an adventure story 'meanwhile' inevitably gets used perhaps even over used, there aren't many options and indeed it has a place, so....)*

Meanwhile Dipstock and his battalion having trekked continuously for three days are only fifty kilometres from the about to be drenched Cyberdino camp. Ploughing onwards unaware of their comrades pending pickle. Dipstok is the next to get a call



from Metanort, who gives him pretty much the same story as he gave Eekslan but without the extreme urgency attached.

"I reckon you will have enough time to get to higher ground. Once they have past you, get on their heels. Who knows if and when the waters passage will loose velocity and dispel. Got it?" rhetorically. "OK now stand by to receive a didgi-map, it will show you where you stand."

"Fine Your Royal Highness, but if you could just explain a littl...." Dipstok stops mid sentence as Metanort switches out.

Dipstok was a great commander but being a smarmy, butt sucking young cyberdino, Metanort had very little time for him. Metanort enjoyed more the matured wit of the likes of Eekslan, allowing a great deal of leeway for him, in fact quite enjoying his banter and bazaar title giving. So it was back to Eekslan that he switched.

"Don't mind me just keep doing what you have to, I'm going to keep the line open, don't want to miss my favourite agent getting washed to..."

"No offence Mindlessness but Shut up!" Interjected Eekslan, straining to hear a new sound which had started up in the distance, an ominous low rumbling sort of sound.

"None taken, hope you get washed away, ha ha." Metanort chuckles, scooping a claw full of cyberdino nibblies into his gnarly old gob, leaning back in his chair he settles down for the show.

Eekslan, currently perch delicately on top of the rock within which the food dispensing unit was situated, was tense yet somehow relaxed in limp anticipation of the inevitable.

The rest of the troops had scattered in search of their own safe place.

Some, mostly the overly loyal, decided it best to hang around Big E and were busy tying themselves off on the rock below him, madly inflating their floaties, bobbling out around their shoulders, holding their heads high.

The rumbling noise Eekslan was labouring to hear was of course the water wall of the flood, now only a matter of minutes away. No longer needing to strain to hear the cascading torrent, Eekslan watches on as it mounts the horizon. He braces himself tightly against the top of the rock.

The forever sharp eyed Mark, first to see the scattering gaggle of Cyberdino's, calls to the others. "Hey everyone check this out!" Pointing straight ahead, in the direction of Eekslan and his bewildered troopers.

"Wooh far out ... Oh no they are all going to get flattened!... Hey!! Dinosaur things!!! look out!!!" Shrieks an altruistic Amanda.

Ahead of them Cyberdinos on foot are scurrying for their lives. Those with hoversticks were making desperate last ditch attempts to float themselves just that little bit higher safer. (The hoverstick's maximum float height being a meter above the ground meant that they were in for a dunking.) Others had simply frozen where they stood, awaiting the inevitable. The water wall thundered on, picking up its first hapless victim or two.

Eekslan risks a final look in the direction of the oncoming torrent. Fifteen meters and closing comes the tormented muddy barrier topped by the surfing Delaware's, all madly waving their arms for Eekslan to get out of the way. Eekslan, caught for anything else to do, buries his head into the rock and prays...

The Delaware's course is dead in line with the rock topped Eekslan, a collision is inevitable, unavoidable. The Delaware's brace themselves against the impending impact as the rock and Eekslan, crash zooming, take over a commanding chunk of their immediate vista, then... WALOOP!!!!!!

Loosing his grip, Eekslan is sent, one way, flipping through the air, his hoverstick the other. Amanda, somehow, amidst the chaos, catches the wayward hoverstick. "Wooh! Great! This one is my one!" She exclaims to the world.

Whether Florence had inadvertently grabbed Eekslan or whether Eekslan had managed to grab a hold of Florence, it wasn't quite clear in the confusion of impact. So regardless how it happened. The disorientated Eekslan is now straddle over a dishevelled Florence's shoulders, floaties flapping in the breeze, tufts of Florence's hair gripped tight, holding on for his life and in fear of it. Florence, thrashes her shoulders and arms around trying to dislodge her passenger. "Get this thing off me!!"... She screams.

Not all of Eekslan's troopers had been so fortunate. The lucky ones bodysurfed, having either managed to leap from their hoversticks slightly higher vantage points with precise timing, elevating themselves to the top of the crest of the wave, or by shooting each other with their anti-gravity weapons thus floating themselves well clear of the torrent. Other, not so fortunate dinos including Obmar got caught in the front wash, and were now tumbling along helplessly, dumping-out then getting sucked back in, with inescapable repetition. The three 'dinos who had tied off on Eekslan's rock were presently still in exactly the same place though now submerged under a meter plus of murky gushing water.

The loaded wall of water continued its journey.

"Just a mo Flo" Albert reaches over grabbing Eekslan by the bloated float around his neck. Albert pulls hard but Eekslan has a good grip, legs bound fast around Florence's neck. Mark leans over lending assistance, with a determined yank, he pulls at the Cyberdino's mechanical right leg, loosening sufficiently Eekslan's determined hold on Florence, enabling Albert to pop him off.

"Got him!" Exclaims Albert, holding Eekslan aloft in one victorious hand.

"Thank goodness!" Comes a relieved Florence, kneading with her free hand the muscles in her neck.

The held high Eekslan slams his free middle claw onto the mini keypad illuminated on his other wrist activating the Emergency Signal Generator, and then again two more times for good measure, instantly alerting Metanort, Dipstok and Huledew to his inescapable predicament.

Tightly grasped in Albert's hand Eekslan gives in, captured, demoralised and defeated he goes limp in anticipation to whatever fate and the cosmos had installed for him.

The Delaware's plus passengers surf on, spinning in concentric circles skimming the top of the eternally breaking wave, flanked by several bodysurfing dino troopers, who occasionally made futile attempts to manoeuvre closer to the deflated Eekslan and the Delaware's but were mostly preoccupied, hell bent on keeping control in the turmoil of the ever breaking surging swell.

Continuing on, the water level begins to decrease, so too does the speed of their passage, then as they round a long arcing bend, the ancient river bed splays outwards across a, long time dry, delta. The water wall finally debouches, like a wave softly breaking over a sandy beach, gently depositing the sodden Delaware's, Eekslan, Blorg, Zercon and sundry dino troopers onto dry ground. Leaving them high and dry, surrounded by and entangled in a sea of detritus left behind by the flood along with several half drowned cyberdinos, soaked and bloated, on their backs, feet in the air, semi-conscious, their wipers still swish, swish swishing.

They all lay there, stunned mullet like, gathering their senses, totally exposed and vulnerable.

"Everyone OK" asks Albert, still tightly holding the deflated Eekslan.

"Fine" chorus Florence, Mark and Amanda as our hosed together troupe get to their feet, perusing the carnage of the immediate vicinity and beyond.

"Look up there" yells an incredulous Mark, pointing up the hill in the direction of Dipstok's swarming cyberdino army. There was no time to run, nowhere to hide.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

## **CAPTURED**

Hot in pursuit and currently skirting the high ground around our drying denizens are Dipstok and his 200 strong battalion of dino troopers. On witnessing their quarry being deposited onto the sand down on the valley floor below Dipstok barks out an order. "Attack! Surround, Conquer and retrieve on my command in 3, 2, 1 Go!"

The unleashed 200 mini mechanical reptilians disgorge down the hill, battle armour morphing on, anti-gravity trip guns at the ready, accompanied by a cacophony of their gyro servo driven legs, hoots and roars. Many in their haste trip and fall, in turn causing other hapless dinos to lose their balance, cannoning, tumbling, cartwheeling head over heel down the hillside, creating innumerable piles of steel, flailing flesh and a barrage of offensive language.

Around 100 troopers, finally, make it successfully down to the river bed and surround our heroic four and their dino captives.

Dipstok screams out "Freeze!"

Frozen in a variety of uncoordinated looking aggressive attack poses the dino troopers wait for Dipstok's next command... it comes. "Zap Em" Dipstok yells. Simultaneously 100 antigravity trip guns fire. Buzzzzzz...

Albert, Florence, the kids and their dino captives instantly levitate two and a half meters into the air alongside a mess of flood debris.

A now floating, gyrating Albert is left speechless, Florence calls out "Oh No" Mark "Not again" Amanda "There's just too many of them" "Stay strong and tight lipped, let me do the talking" calls Albert finally finding his voice. Realizing that the jig was up he releases Eekslan from his grip, who drifts off and up just a little bit higher.

Blorg and Zercon still cocooned in Florence's straight jacket smock let out a duet-ed sigh of relief, wriggling about ecstatically in anticipation of their pending release.

Dipstok clicks a switch on his antigravity gun to reverse the effect, takes aim at Eekslan and fires. Eekslan wobbles for a moment, mid-air, and then drifts gently back to the ground.

Our four hose tethered together heroes remain suspended, sharing silent scared yet reassuring self-supportive glances, surrounded by a sea of celebrative cyberdinos hooting, snarling and high fiving each other. Testosterone saturated by their success.

Eekslan free at last, smiles to himself a scheming and knowing smile then enthusiastically congratulates Dipstok and crew "Good job boys" before aggressively reclaiming command, barking out "Dipstok get this rabble back under control immediately! A fear driven silence instantaneously ripples through the dino battalion, their moment of joy definitively quashed.

Eekslan continues "And get me a working hover stick; secure those things, pointing towards the Delawares. And plot our return journey." Then lowering his voice to a whisper meant only for Dipstok "A call to Old FartFace can wait I'm sure he's remotely seen all he needs to see for now" ...

Eekslan mounts his swiftly delivered hoverstick. Dipstok gets his petrified battalion back in order then selects 3 cyberdinos to secure, scan and wrangle the Delawares, instructing the three troopers to continually keep them aloft by zapping them occasionally with their antigravity trip guns. They take no time tethering our intrepid adventurers by way of dino lassos attached to an arm or leg. They then scan each of the floating fleshy bodies; this information is beamed directly back to Huledew and his plugged in crew in the science centre. And of course, the three nominated wranglers were only more than happy to zap the Delaware's every 15 minutes or so, keeping them aloft, ineffective and out of the way.

Our luckless four now looking like four human shaped carnival balloons, stunned and dumfounded, suspended mid-air fluttering in a light breeze.

Triumphantly, in marching formation, the now 150 strong battalion and their captives head off on what ends up being a very boring and uneventful two day forced trek back to the Cyberdino metropolis. The, unfortunate, completely forgotten about, obviously insignificant and now totally depressed Blorg and Zercon left to stew in their own juices, still swathed tightly in Florence's cosy smock.

Meanwhile back in the cyberdino metropolis Metanort who had witnessed everything, via countless video feeds coming from numerous cyberdino body cams linked to his ultimate control centre, was wistfully thinking that they (Eekslan or Dipstok) should have contacted me first to let me know how the show goes. Metanort stoic like a rock point-blank refusing to even contemplate calling his minions first feeling it was there responsibility to make contact and not his.

Deflated and feeling somewhat paranoid, decidedly unappreciated and unloved the normally maniacal Metanort orders, the most expensive on the menu, twenty course take away along with a comprehensive service overhaul of his mechanical bits and thorough teeth clean followed by a two hour long full body massage, in an attempt to sooth his psychotic soul. Keeping him blissfully preoccupied for the next two days, the time it would take for Eekslan, his gaggle and captives to arrive back home.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN. **METANORT'S METROPOLIS.**

A thin blue beam of light cuts across the horizon sending shards of light reflecting from the domed metropolis's roof heralding a new day. The three suns leisurely drift into view. The humungous moon hangs precariously on the far horizon, and then dips silently out of sight.

All across Metanort's metropolis, your average Joe/Josephine, cyberdino was going about his/hers daily waking routines, bleary eyed, unmotivated, simply surviving by going through the motions.

The same old pre-processed slop from the universal food dispensing machine plus a mug of the half decent, dino coffee. A two minute sit on the battery recharge stool to replenish ones battery powered mechanical bits followed by a short sonic shower; pretty much every house hold had one, that's if they could afford it.

Lastly, a brief aimless shuffle to the local transport hub suction chute, doing ones best not to engage with the neighbours along the way. The inescapable cueing, sardine-like, nose to tail, coupled to other uninspired, in line, dino citizens, standing, waiting, then shuffling forward one at a time, to be sucked, into the city wide transport system. A final obliquely aggressive glance and snarl towards the neighbour just for good measure. Most cyberdinos truly hated their neighbours as they needed someone to blame for their pathetic existence, and who better to do that to than someone you get to see and hear on a daily basis.

Ultimately to be delivered, in no time, Shooosh... to which ever sterile computerized, mechanized work place a cyberdino worker worked in.

In the cyberdino science centre chief scientist Huledew and his plugged in analysts continue to search, research, edit, update and feed all data gathered pertaining to the aliens into the system.

Imagery and text flash across screens showing the evolution of man from monkey to the middle Palaeolithic through to the modern day intercut by a fractured history of man's achievements, follies and disasters; stone tools to pyramids, steam to nuclear, religion, politics, war, art, culture, television, music...

A mosaic of audio fragments, jostle for space, garbled gibberish pumping out from a myriad of speakers, underscoring the whole intelligence gathering scene.

The purring multi banked computer system digests and analyses all. AI software sequences kick in, intelligently building innumerable useful applications pertaining to the homosapien intruders, including; dietary requirements, hygiene regimes, language translation, body organs and their functions, xenophobic tendencies, prejudices, bigotries, vulnerabilities, a definitive memory bank of mankind.

*Authors note: How embarrassing!*

Huledew was fully aware of the potential rewards Eekslan would rain upon him. So was making every technologically conceivable attempt to create an all-encompassing database which would assist Eekslan to keep on top of, and remain as the unassuming dominant dino alpha, the one who really covertly keeps control in Metanort's majestic metropolis.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN.     **HOME COMING.**

To be continued...

*Eventually their ride bottoms out leaving them high and dry but vulnerable to capture by Dipstok and Co. who do indeed capture the Delaware's. Freeing, to their great relief, Zercon, Blorg and to a lesser extent the now fascinated Eekslan. Whose alliances, in time, will shift towards the Delvwares as Mark and Eekslan form a relationship, Mark out of fascination of something new and his quick ability with all things computer based and for Eekslan out of simply being bored with his lot and wanting something more. More to the point they learn to communicate to each other after developing a dino to English translator.*

*Triumphant the cocky Dipstok presents the Delvwares to Metanort, who places them into the Cyberdino curiosities museum as a live public exhibit. Cyberdino's line streets to see their only living exhibit all the other exotic interstellar creature displays stuffed, animated in repetitive routines and slightly moth eaten. Was this also to be their fate???*

*Something is afoot. The scheming Eekslan and Delawares go into action. Eekslan willing to commit treason to visit such a place as earth. Mark being the interpreter to the rest of the Delaware's, as together they hatch a plan of escape. They do escape along with antigravity devices (Eekslan not wanting to leave without a antigravity trip gun, Amanda and Mark holding onto their hoversticks, Florence and a cyberdino food automate and Albert just his new found self.) back to earth.*

*Earth just hours after they had originally left. Finding themselves inside the boarded up, wasted lounge room of 24 Whale street. In darkness, guarded both front and back by security officers. From here on in the real adventure begins.*

## **Story Characters**

*Delaware family:*

*Albert*

*Florence*

*Mark*

*Amanda*

*Peter and Allison the parents*

*Captain Straten – Graviton commander*

*Cyberdinos:*

*Metanort – Ruler of the Cyberdinos and commander in chief*

*Eekslan – top agent (also referred to as Big E)*

*Huledew – chief scientist*

*Lieutenant Obmar – Eekslan's second in command*

*Blorg and Zercon – forward search team troopers*

*Lieutenant colonel Dipstok – Battalion leader*

*Notes:*

*Gulliver's Travels;*

*the whole novel is like a mirror by which human flaws are reflected*

*Ah ha... u finally cracked it... I think it's time we all become tech devolutionist! these daze it's a mind Fk to update/upgrade or even simply interface with the beast. I'm dreading the next several years as my system and software slowly but steadily become antiquated.... bla bla bla... But hey well done on reconnecting Skype...*

The training of local forces in northern Iraq by Dutch soldiers will resume as soon as possible, the deputy head of the Dutch diplomatic mission to Baghdad said on Thursday. The suspension announced earlier this week was in accordance with increased security measures ordered by the coalition leadership, army chief Eric Strating said on Twitter.